Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/introductiontost00symo

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF
BROWNING

All rights reserved

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF BROWNING

BY

ARTHUR SYMONS

NEW EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

1906
LONDON
J. M. DENT & CO.
29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

"... *Browning, a great poet, a very great poet indeed, as the world will have to agree with us in thinking.*"—LANDOR.

PR
4238
S78

TO

GEORGE MEREDITH

NOVELIST AND POET

THIS LITTLE BOOK ON AN ILLUSTRIOUS CONTEMPORARY

IS WITH DEEP RESPECT AND ADMIRATION

INSCRIBED.

PREFACE

This *Introduction to the Study of Browning*, which is now reprinted in a new form, revised throughout, and with everything relating to facts carefully brought up to date, has been for many years out of print. I wrote it as an act of homage to the poet whom I had worshipped from my boyhood; I meant it to be, in almost his own words, used of Shelley, some approach to "the signal service it was the dream of my boyhood to render to his fame and memory."

It was sufficiently rewarded by three things: first, by the generous praise of Walter Pater, in the *Guardian*, which led to the beginning of my friendship with him; then, by a single sentence from George Meredith, "You have done knightly service to a brave leader"; lastly, by a letter from Browning himself, in which he said: "How can I manage even to thank—much more praise—what, in its generosity of appreciation, makes the poorest recognition 'come too near the praising of myself'?"

I repeat these things now, because they seem to justify me in dragging back into sight a book written when I was very young, and, as I am only too conscious, lacking in many of the qualities which I have since acquired or developed. But, on going over it, I have found, for the most part, what seems to me a sound foundation, though little enough may be built on that foundation. I have revised many sentences, and a few opinions; but, while conscious that I should approach the whole subject now

in a different way, I have found surprisingly few occasions for any fundamental or serious change of view. I am conscious how much I owed, at that time, to the most helpful and judicious friend whom I could possibly have had at my elbow, Dykes Campbell. There are few pages of my manuscript which he did not read and criticise, and not a page of my proofs which he did not labour over as if it had been his own. He forced me to learn accuracy, he cut out my worst extravagances, he kept me sternly to my task. It was in writing this book under his encouragement and correction that I began to learn the first elements of literary criticism.

This new edition, then, of my book is new and yet the same. I have altered everything that seemed to require altering, and I have made the style a little more equable; but I have not, I hope, broken anywhere into a new key, or added any sort of decoration not in keeping with the original plainness of the stuff. When Pater said: "His book is, according to his intention, before all things a useful one," he expressed my wish in the matter; and also when he said: "His aim is to point his readers to the best, the indisputable, rather than to the dubious portions of his author's work." In the letter from which I have quoted, Browning said: "It does indeed strike me as wonderful that you should have given such patient attention to all those poems, and (if I dare say further) so thoroughly entered into—at any rate—the spirit in which they were written and the purpose they hoped to serve." If Browning really thought that, my purpose, certainly, had been accomplished.

April 1906.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

I HAVE ever held that the rod with which popular fancy invests criticism is properly the rod of divination : a hazel-switch for the discovery of buried treasure, not a birch-twig for the castigation of offenders. It has therefore been my aim in the following pages to direct attention to the best, not to forage for the worst—the small faults which acquire prominence only by isolation—of the poet with whose writings I am concerned. I wish also to give information, more or less detailed, about each of Mr. Browning's works ; information sufficient to the purpose I have in view, which is to induce those who have hitherto deprived themselves of a stimulating pleasure to deprive themselves of it no longer. Further, my aim is in no sense controversial. In a book whose sole purpose is to serve as an introduction to the study of a single one of our contemporary poets, I have consciously and carefully refrained from instituting comparisons—which I deprecate as, to say the least, unnecessary—between the poet in question and any of the other eminent poets in whose time we have the honour of living.

I have to thank Mr. Browning for permission to reprint the interesting and now almost inaccessible prefaces to some of his earlier works, which will be found in Appendix II. I have also to thank Dr. Furnivall for permission to make use of his *Browning Bibliography*, and for other kind help. I wish to acknowledge my obligation

to Mrs. Orr's *Handbook to Robert Browning's Works*, and to some of the Browning Society's papers, for helpful information and welcome light. Finally, I would tender my especial and grateful thanks to Mr. J. Dykes Campbell, who has given me much kindly assistance.

Sept. 15, 1886.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
General Characteristics	1
Characteristics of the Poems	33
Appendix :	
I. A Bibliography of Robert Browning .	241
II. Reprint of Discarded Prefaces to the First Editions of some of Browning's Works .	255
Index to Poems	261

ROBERT BROWNING

Born May 7, 1812.

Died December 12, 1889.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE STUDY OF BROWNING

The first and perhaps the final impression we receive from the work of Robert Browning is that of a great nature, an immense personality. The poet in him is made up of many men. He is dramatist, humorist, lyrist, painter, musician, philosopher and scholar, each in full measure, and he includes and dominates them all. In richness of nature, in scope and penetration of mind and vision, in energy of passion and emotion, he is probably second among English poets to Shakespeare alone. In art, in the power or the patience of working his native ore, he is surpassed by many; but few have ever held so rich a mine in fee. So large, indeed, appear to be his natural endowments, that we cannot feel as if the whole vast extent of his work has come near to exhausting them.

As it is, he has written more than any other English poet with the exception of Shakespeare, and he comes very near the gigantic total of Shakespeare. Mass of work is of course in itself worth nothing without due quality; but there is no surer test nor any more fortunate concomitant of greatness than the union of the two. The highest genius is splendidly spendthrift; it is only the second order that needs to be niggardly. Browning's works are not a mere collection of poems, they are a

literature. And his literature is the richest of modern times. If "the best poetry is that which reproduces the most of life," his place is among the great poets of the world. In the vast extent of his work he has dealt with or touched on nearly every phase and feature of humanity, and his scope is bounded only by the soul's limits and the last reaches of life. But of all "Poetical Works," small or great, his is the most consistent in its unity. The manner has varied not a little, the comparative worth of individual poems is widely different, but from the first word to the last the attitude is the same, the outlook on life the same, the conception of God and man, of the world and nature, always the same. This unity, though it may be deduced from, or at least accommodated to, a system of philosophical thought, is much more the outcome of a natural and inevitable bent. No great poet ever constructed his poems upon a theory, but a theory may often be very legitimately discovered in them. Browning, in his essay on Shelley, divides all poets into two classes, subjective and objective, the Seer and the Maker. His own genius includes a large measure of them both; for it is equally strong on the dramatic and the metaphysical side. There are for him but two realities, and but two subjects, Life and Thought. On these are expended all his imagination and all his intellect, more consistently and in a higher degree than can be said of any English poet since the age of Elizabeth. Life and thought, the dramatic and the metaphysical, are not considered apart, but woven into one seamless tissue; and in regard to both he has one point of view and one manner of treatment. It is this that causes the unity which subsists throughout his work; and it is this, too,

which distinguishes him among poets, and makes that originality by virtue of which he has been described as the most striking figure in our poetic literature.

Most poets endeavour to sink the individual in the universal; it is Browning's special distinction that when he is most universal he is most individual. As a thinker he conceives of humanity not as an aggregate, but as a collection of units. Most thinkers write and speak of man; Browning of men. With man as a species, with man as a society, he does not concern himself, but with individual man and man. Every man is for him an epitome of the universe, a centre of creation. Life exists for each as completely and separately as if he were the only inhabitant of our planet. In the religious sense this is the familiar Christian view; but Browning, while accepting, does not confine himself to, the religious sense. He conceives of each man as placed on the earth with a purpose of probation. Life is given him as a test of his quality; he is exposed to the chances and changes of existence, to the opposition and entanglement of circumstances, to evil, to doubt, to the influence of his fellow-men, and to the conflicting powers of his own soul; and he succeeds or fails, toward God, or as regards his real end and aim, according as he is true or false to his better nature, his conception of right. He is not to be judged by the vulgar standards of worldly success or unsuccess; not even by his actions, good or bad as they may seem to us, for action can never fully translate the thought or motive which lay at its root; success or unsuccess, the prime and final fact in life, lies between his soul and God. The poet, in Browning's view of him, is God's witness, and must see and speak for God. He

must therefore conceive of each individual separately and distinctively, and he must see how each soul conceives of itself.

It is here that Browning parts company most decisively with all other poets who concern themselves exclusively with life, dramatic poets, as we call them ; so that it seems almost necessary to invent some new term to define precisely his special attitude. And hence it is that in his drama thought plays comparatively so large, and action comparatively so small, a part; hence, that action is valued only in so far as it reveals thought or motive, not for its own sake, as the crown and flower of these.

> "To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self
> His quick sense looks : he crowns and calls aright
> The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,
> Takes flesh i' the world, and clothes itself a king." [1]

For his endeavour is not to set men in action for the pleasure of seeing them move; but to see and show, in their action and inaction alike, the real impulses of their being : to see how each soul conceives of itself.

This individuality of presentment is carried out equally in the domain of life and of thought; as each man lives, so he thinks and perceives, so he apprehends God and truth, for himself only. It is evident that this special standpoint will give not only a unity but an originality to the work of which it may be called the root ; equally evident that it will demand a special method and a special instrument.

The dramatic poet, in the ordinary sense, in the sense in which we apply it to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, aims at showing, by means of action, the development of character as it manifests itself to the world in deeds.

[1] *Luria*, Act iii.

His study is character, but it is character in action, considered only in connection with a particular grouping of events, and only so far as it produces or operates upon these. The processes are concealed from us, we see the result. In the very highest realisations of this dramatic power, and always in intention, we are presented with a perfect picture, in which every actor lives, and every word is audible ; perfect, complete in itself, without explanation, without comment ; a dogma incarnate, which we must accept as it is given us, and explain and illustrate for ourselves. If we wish to know what this character or that thought or felt in his very soul, we may perhaps have data from which to construct a more or less probable hypothesis ; but that is all. We are told nothing, we care to know nothing of what is going on in the thought ; of the infinitely subtle meshes of motive or emotion which will perhaps find no direct outcome in speech, no direct manifestation in action, but by which the soul's life in reality subsists. This is not the intention : it is a spectacle of life we are beholding ; and life is action.

But is there no other sense in which a poet may be dramatic, besides this sense of the acting drama ? no new form possible, which

> "Peradventure may outgrow,
> The simulation of the painted scene,
> Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
> And take for a nobler stage the soul itself,
> In shifting fancies and celestial lights,
> With all its grand orchestral silences,
> To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds." [1]

This new form of drama is the drama as we see it in

[1] *Aurora Leigh*, Book Fifth.

Browning, a drama of the interior, a tragedy or comedy of the soul. Instead of a grouping of characters which shall act on one another to produce a certain result in action, we have a grouping of events useful or important only as they influence the character or the mind. This is very clearly explained in the original Advertisement to *Paracelsus*, where Browning tells us that his poem is an attempt

"to reverse the method usually adopted by writers whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons and events; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded."

In this way, by making the soul the centre of action, he is enabled (thinking himself into it, as all dramatists must do) to bring out its characteristics, to reveal its very nature. Suppose him to be attracted by some particular soul or by some particular act. The problem occupies him: the more abstruse and entangled the more attractive to him it is; he winds his way into the heart of it, or, we might better say, he picks to pieces the machinery. Presently he begins to reconstruct, before our eyes, the whole series of events, the whole substance of the soul, but, so to speak, turned inside out. We watch the workings of the mental machinery as it is slowly disclosed before us; we note the specialties of construction, its individual character, the interaction of parts, every secret of it. We thus come to see that,

considered from the proper point of view, everything is clear, regular and explicable in however entangled an action, however obscure a soul; we see that what is external is perfectly natural when we can view its evolution from what is internal. It must not be supposed that Browning explains this to us in the manner of an anatomical lecturer; he makes every character explain itself by its own speech, and very often by speech that is or seems false and sophistical, so only that it is personal and individual, and explains, perhaps by exposing, its speaker.

This, then, is Browning's consistent mental attitude, and his special method. But he has also a special instrument, the monologue. The drama of action demands a concurrence of several distinct personalities, influencing one another rapidly by word or deed, so as to bring about the catastrophe; hence the propriety of the dialogue. But the introspective drama, in which the design is to represent and reveal the individual, requires a concentration of interest, a focussing of light on one point, to the exclusion or subordination of surroundings; hence the propriety of the monologue, in which a single speaker or thinker can consciously or unconsciously exhibit his own soul. This form of monologue, learnt perhaps from Landor, who used it with little psychological intention, appears in almost the earliest of Browning's poems, and he has developed it more skilfully and employed it more consistently than any other writer. Even in works like *Sordello* and *Red Cotton Night-cap Country*, which are thrown into the narrative form, many of the finest and most characteristic parts are in monologue; and *The Inn*

Album is a series of slightly-linked dialogues which are only monologues in disguise. Nearly all the lyrics, romances, idyls, nearly all the miscellaneous poems, long and short, are monologues. And even in the dramas, as will be seen later, there is visible a growing tendency toward the monologue with its mental and individual, in place of the dialogue with its active and outer interest.

Browning's aim, then, being to see how each soul conceives of itself, and to exhibit its essential qualities, yet without complication of incident, it is his frequent practice to reveal the soul to itself by the application of a sudden test, which shall condense the long trial of years into a single moment, and so "flash the truth out by one blow." To this practice we owe his most vivid and notable work. "The poetry of Robert Browning," says Pater, "is pre-eminently the poetry of situations." He selects a character, no matter how uninteresting in itself, and places it in some situation where its vital essence may become apparent, in some crisis of conflict or opportunity. The choice of good or evil is open to it, and in perhaps a single moment its fate will be decided. When a soul plays dice with the devil there is only a second in which to win or lose; but the second may be worth an eternity. These moments of intense significance, these tremendous spiritual crises, are struck out in Browning's poetry with a clearness and sharpness of outline that no other poet has achieved. "To realise such a situation, to define in a chill and empty atmosphere the focus where rays, in themselves pale and impotent, unite and begin to burn, the artist has to employ the most cunning detail, to complicate and

refine upon thought and passion a thousand fold. . . . Yet, in spite of this intricacy, the poem has the clear ring of a central motive; we receive from it the impression of one imaginative tone, of a single creative act."[1]

It is as a result of this purpose, in consonance with this practice, that we get in Browning's works so large a number of distinct human types, and so great a variety of surroundings in which they are placed. Only in Shakespeare can we find anything like the same variety of distinct human characters, vital creations endowed with thoughtful life; and not even, perhaps, in Shakespeare, such novelty and variety of *milieu*. There is scarcely a salient epoch in the history of the modern world which he has not touched, always with the same vital and instinctive sympathy based on profound and accurate knowledge. Passing by the legendary and remote ages and civilisations of East and West, he has painted the first dawn of the modern spirit in the Athens of Socrates and Euripides, revealed the whole temper and tendency of the twilight age between Paganism and Christianity, and recorded the last utterance of the last apostle of the now-conquering creed; he has distilled the very essence of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the very essence of the modern world. The men and women who live and move in that new world of his creation are as varied as life itself; they are kings and beggars, saints and lovers, great captains, poets, painters, musicians, priests and popes, Jews, gipsies and dervishes, street-girls, princesses, dancers with the wicked witchery of the daughter

[1] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 226.

of Herodias, wives with the devotion of the wife of Brutus, joyous girls and malevolent greybeards, statesmen, cavaliers, soldiers of humanity, tyrants and bigots, ancient sages and modern spiritualists, heretics, scholars, scoundrels, devotees, rabbis, persons of quality and men of low estate, men and women as multiform as nature or society has made them. He has found and studied humanity, not only in English towns and villages, in the glare of gaslight and under the open sky, but on the Roman Campagna, in Venetian gondolas, in Florentine streets, on the Boulevards of Paris and in the Prado of Madrid, in the snow-bound forests of Russia, beneath the palms of Persia and upon Egyptian sands, on the coasts of Normandy and the salt plains of Brittany, among Druses and Arabs and Syrians, in brand-new Boston and amidst the ruins of Thebes. But this infinite variety has little in it of mere historic or social curiosity. I do not think Browning has ever set himself the task of recording the legend of the ages, though to some extent he has done it. The instinct of the poet seizes on a type of character, the eye of the painter perceives the shades and shapes of line and colour and form required to give it picturesque prominence, and the learning of the scholar then sets up a fragment of the broken past, or re-fashions a portion of the living present, as an appropriate and harmonious scene or background. The statue is never dwarfed by the pedestal.

The characteristic of which I have been speaking (the persistent care for the individual and personal, as distinguished from the universal and general) while it is the secret of his finest achievements, and rightly his

special charm, is of all things the most alien to the ordinary conceptions of poetry, and the usual preferences for it. The popularity of rare and delicate poetry, which condescends to no cheap bids for it, poetry like Tennyson's, for instance, is largely due to the very quality which Browning's finest characteristic excludes from his. Compare, altogether apart from the worth and workmanship, one of Tennyson's with one of Browning's best lyrics. The perfection of the former consists in the exquisite way in which it expresses feelings common to all. The perfection of the latter consists in the intensity of its expression of a single moment of passion or emotion, one peculiar to a single personality, and to that personality only at a single moment. To appreciate it we must enter keenly and instantaneously into the imaginary character at its imagined crisis; and, even when this is easiest to do, it is evident that there must be more difficulty in doing it (for it requires a certain exertion) than in merely letting the mind lie at rest, accepting and absorbing. And the difficulty is increased when we remember another of Browning's characteristics, closely allied to this, and, indeed, resulting from it: his preference for the unusual and complex rather than the simple and ordinary. People prefer to read about characters which they can understand at first sight, with which they can easily sympathise. A dramatist, who insists on presenting them with complex and exceptional characters, studies of the good in evil and the evil in good, representations of states of mind which are not habitual to them, or which they find it difficult to realise in certain lights, can never obtain so quick or so hearty a recognition as one who deals with great actions,

large and clear characters, familiar motives. When the head has to be exercised before the heart, there is chilling of sympathy.

Allied to Browning's originality in temper, topic, treatment and form, is his originality in style; an originality which is again due, in large measure, to the same prevailing cause. His style is vital, his verse moves to the throbbing of an inner organism, not to the pulsations of a machine. He prefers, as indeed all true poets do, but more exclusively than any other poet, sense to sound, thought to expression. In his desire of condensation he employs as few words as are consistent with the right expression of his thought; he rejects superfluous adjectives, and all stop-gap words. He refuses to use words for words' sake: he declines to interrupt conversation with a display of fireworks: and as a result it will be found that his finest effects of versification correspond with his highest achievements in imagination and passion. As a dramatic poet he is obliged to modulate and moderate, sometimes almost to vulgarise, his style and diction for the proper expression of some particular character, in whose mouth exquisite turns of phrase and delicate felicities of rhythm would be inappropriate. He will not *let himself go* in the way of easy floridity, as writers may whose themes are more "ideal." And where many writers would attempt merely to simplify and sweeten verse, he endeavours to give it fuller expressiveness, to give it strength and newness. It follows that Browning's verse is not so uniformly melodious as that of many other poets. Where it seems to him necessary to sacrifice one of the two, sense or sound, he has never hesitated which to

sacrifice. But while he has certainly failed in some of his works, or in some passages of them, to preserve the due balance, while he has at times undoubtedly sacrificed sound too liberally to the claims of sense, the extent of this sacrifice is very much less than is generally supposed. The notion, only too general, expressed by such a phrase as "his habitual rudeness of versification" (used by no unfavourable *Edinburgh* reviewer in 1869) is one of the most singularly erroneous perversions of popular prejudice that have ever called for correction at the hands of serious criticism.

Browning is far indeed from paying no attention, or little, to metre and versification. Except in some of his later blank verse, and in a few other cases, his very errors are just as often the result of hazardous experiments as of carelessness and inattention. In one very important matter, that of rhyme, he is perhaps the greatest master in our language; in single and double, in simple and grotesque alike, his rhymes are as accurate as they are ingenious. His lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any preceding English poet, not excepting Shelley. His blank verse at its best is more vital in quality than that of any modern poet. And both in rhymed and in blank verse he has written passages which for almost every technical quality are hardly to be surpassed in the language.

That Browning's style should have changed in the course of years is only natural, and its development has been in the natural (if not always in the best) direction. "The later manner of a painter or poet," says F. W. H. Myers in his essay on Virgil, "generally differs from his earlier manner in much the same way. We observe in

him a certain impatience of the rules which have guided him to excellence, a certain desire to use his materials more freely, to obtain bolder and newer effects." These tendencies and others of the kind are specially manifest in Browning, as they must be in a writer of strongly marked originality; for originality always strengthens with use, and often hardens to eccentricity, as we may observe in the somewhat parallel case of Carlyle. We find as a consequence that a great deal of his later poetry is much less attractive and much less artistically perfect than his earlier work, while just those failings to which his principles of poetic art rendered him liable become more and more frequent and prominent. But, good or bad, it has grown with his growth, and we can conceive him saying, with Aurora Leigh,

> "So life, in deepening with me, deepened all
> The course I took, the work I did. Indeed
> The academic law convinced of sin;
> The critics cried out on the falling off,
> Regretting the first manner. But I felt
> My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show
> It lived, it also—certes incomplete,
> Disordered with all Adam in the blood,
> But even its very tumours, warts and wens,
> Still organised by and implying life." [1]

It has been, as a rule, strangely overlooked, though it is a matter of the first moment, that Browning's poems are in the most precise sense *works of art*, and this in a very high degree, positive and relative, if we understand by a "work of art" a poem which attains its end and fulfils its purpose completely, and which has a worthy end and plain purpose to attain.

[1] *Aurora Leigh*, Book Third.

Surely this is of far more vital importance than the mere melodiousness of single lines, or a metre of unvarying sweetness bearing gently along in its placid course (as a stream the leaf or twig fallen into it from above) some tiny thought or finikin fragment of emotion. Matthew Arnold, who was both poet and critic, has told us with emphasis of "the necessity of accurate construction, and the subordinate character of expression." [1] His next words, though bearing a slightly different signification, may very legitimately be applied to Browning. Arnold tells us "how unspeakably superior is the effect of the one moral impression left by a great action treated as a whole, to the effect produced by the most striking single thought or by the happiest image." For "a great action," read "an adequate subject," and the words define and defend Browning's principle and practice exactly. There is no characteristic of his work more evident, none more admirable or more rare, than the unity, the compactness and completeness, the skill and care in construction and definiteness in impression, of each poem. I do not know any contemporary of whom this may more truly be said. The assertion will be startling, no doubt, to those who are accustomed to think of Browning (as people once thought of Shakespeare) as a poet of great gifts but little skill; as a giant, but a clumsy giant; as what the French call a *nature*, an almost unconscious force, expending itself at random, without rule or measure. But take, for example, the series of *Men and Women*, as originally published, read poem after poem (there are fifty to choose from) and scrutinise each

[1] Preface to *Poems*, 1853.

separately; see what was the writer's intention, and observe how far he has fulfilled it, how far he has succeeded in conveying to your mind a distinct and sharply-cut impression. You will find that whatever be the subject, whatever the style, whether in your eyes the former be mistaken, the latter perverse, the poem itself, within its recognised limits, is designed, constructed and finished with the finest skill of the draughtsman or the architect. You will find that the impression you have received from the whole is single and vivid, and, while you may not perceive it, it will generally be the case that certain details at which your fastidiousness cries out, certain uncouthnesses, as you fancy, are perfectly appropriate and in their place, and have contributed to the perfection of the *ensemble*.

A word may here be said in reference to the charge of "obscurity," which, from the time when Browning's earliest poem was disposed of by a complacent critic in the single phrase, "A piece of pure bewilderment," has been hurled at each succeeding poem with re-iterate vigour of virulence. The charge of "pure bewilderment" is about as reasonable as the charge of "habitual rudeness of versification." It is a fashion. People abuse their "Browning" as they abuse their "Bradshaw," though all that is wanting, in either case, is a little patience and a little common sense. Browning might say, as his wife said in an early preface, "I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry, nor leisure for the hour of the poet;" as indeed he has himself said, to much the same effect, in a letter printed many years ago: "I never pretended to offer such literature as

should be a substitute for a cigar or a game at dominoes to an idle man." But he has not made anything like such a demand on the reader's faculties as people, *not* readers, seem to suppose. *Sordello* is difficult, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* is difficult, so, perhaps, in parts, is *Fifine at the Fair*; so, too, on account of its unfamiliar allusions, is *Aristophanes' Apology;* and a few smaller poems, here and there, remotely argumentative or specially complex in psychology, are difficult. But really these are about all to which such a term as "unintelligible," so freely and recklessly flung about, could with the faintest show of reason be applied by any reasonable being. In the 21,116 lines which form Browning's longest work and masterpiece, the "psychological epic" of *The Ring and the Book*, I am inclined to think it possible that a careful scrutiny might reveal 116 which an ordinary reader would require to read twice. Anything more clear than the work as a whole it would be difficult to find. It is much easier to follow than *Paradise Lost;* the *Agamemnon* is rather less easy to follow than *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.*

That there is some excuse for the accusation, no one would or could deny. But it is only the excuse of a misconception. Browning is a thinker of extraordinary depth and subtlety; his themes are seldom superficial, often very remote, and his thought is, moreover, as swift as it is subtle. To a dull reader there is little difference between cloudy and fiery thought; the one is as much too bright for him as the other is too dense. Of all thinkers in poetry, Browning is the most swift and fiery. "If there is any great quality," says Mr. Swinburne, in those noble pages in which he has so generously and

triumphantly vindicated his brother-poet from this very charge of obscurity—

"If there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect, it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind, or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realise with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward, as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread, and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought, woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception, and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway."[1]

Moreover, while a writer who deals with easy themes has no excuse if he is not pellucid at a glance, one who employs his intellect and imagination on high and hard questions has a right to demand a corresponding closeness of attention, and a right to say, with Bishop Butler, in answer to a similar complaint: "It must be acknowledged that some of the following discourses are very abstruse and difficult; or, if you please, obscure; but I must take leave to add that those alone are judges whether or no, and how far this is a fault, who are judges whether or no, and how far it might have been avoided—those only who will be at the trouble to understand

[1] *George Chapman: A Critical Essay*, 1875.

what is here said, and to see how far the things here insisted upon, and not other things, might have been put in a plainer manner." [1]

There is another popular misconception to which also a word in passing may as well be devoted. This is the idea that Browning's personality is apt to get confused with his characters', that his men and women are not separate creations, projected from his brain into an independent existence, but mere masks or puppets through whose mouths he speaks. This fallacy arises from the fact that not a few of his imaginary persons express themselves in a somewhat similar fashion; or, as people too rashly say, "talk like Browning." The explanation of this apparent paradox, so far as it exists, is not far to seek. All art is a compromise, and all dramatic speech is in fact impossible. No persons in real life would talk as Shakespeare or any other great dramatist makes them talk. Nor do the characters of Shakespeare talk like those of any other great dramatist, except in so far as later playwrights have consciously imitated Shakespeare. Every dramatic writer has his own style, and in this style, subject to modification, all his characters speak. Just as a soul, born out of eternity into time, takes on itself the impress of earth and the manners of human life, so a dramatic creation, pure essence in the shaping imagination of the poet, takes on itself, in its passage into life, something of the impress of its abode. "The poet, in short, endows his

[1] *Works*, 1847, Preface to Sermons, pp. viii.-ix., where will also be found some exceedingly sensible remarks, which I commend to those whom it concerns, on persons "who take it for granted that they are acquainted with everything; and that no subject, if treated in the manner it should be, can be treated in any manner but what is familiar and easy to them."

creations with his own attributes; he enables them to utter their feelings as if they themselves were poets, thus giving a true voice even to that intensity of passion which in real life often hinders expression."[1] If this fact is recognised (that dramatic speech is not real speech, but poetical speech, and poetical speech infused with the individual style of each individual dramatist, modulated, indeed, but true to one keynote) then it must be granted that Browning has as much right to his own style as other dramatists have to theirs, and as little right as they to be accused on that account of putting his personality into his work. But as Browning's style is very pronounced and original, it is more easily recognisable than that of most dramatists (so far, no doubt, a defect[2]) and for this reason it has come to seem relatively more prominent than it really is. This consideration, and not any confusion of identity, is the cause of whatever similarity of speech exists between Browning and his characters, or between individual characters. The similarity is only skin-deep. Take a convenient instance, *The Ring and the Book*. I have often seen it stated that the nine tellings of the story are all told in the same style, that all the speakers, Guido and Pompilia, the Pope and Tertium Quid alike, speak

[1] "Realism in Dramatic Art," *New Quarterly Magazine*, Oct., 1879.

[2] Allowing at its highest valuation all that need be allowed on this score, we find only that Mr. Browning has the defects of his qualities; and from these who is exempted? By virtue of this style of his he has succeeded in rendering into words the inmost thoughts and finest shades of feeling of the "men and women fashioned by his fancy," and in such a task we can pardon even a fault, for such a result we can overlook even a blemish; as Lessing, in *Laokoon*, remarking on an error in Raphael's drapery, finely says, "Who will not rather praise him for having had the wisdom and the courage to commit a slight fault, for the sake of greater fulness of expression?"

like Browning. I cannot see it. On the contrary, I have been astonished, in reading and re-reading the poem, at the variety, the difference, the wonderful individuality in each speaker's way of telling the same story; at the profound art with which the rhythm, the metaphors, the very details of language, no less than the broad distinctions of character and the subtle indications of bias, are adapted and converted into harmony. A certain general style, a certain general manner of expression, are common to all, as is also the case in, let us say, *The Tempest*. But what distinction, what variation of tone, what delicacy and expressiveness of modulation! As a simple matter of fact, few writers have ever had a greater flexibility of style than Browning.

I am doubtful whether full justice has been done to one section of Browning's dramatic work, his portraits of women. The presence of woman is not perhaps relatively so prominent in his work as it is in the work of some other poets; woman is to him neither an exclusive preoccupation, nor a continual unrest; but as faithful and vital representations, I do not hesitate to put his portraits of women quite on a level with his portraits of men, and far beyond those of any other English poet of the last three centuries. In some of them, notably in Pompilia, there is a something which always seems to me almost incredible in a man: an instinct that one would have thought only a woman could have for women. And his women, good or bad, are always real women, and they are represented without bias. Browning is one of the very few men (Mr. Meredith, whose women are, perhaps, the consummate flower of his work, is his only other English con-

temporary) who can paint women without idealisation or degradation, not from the man's side, but from their own; as living equals, not as goddesses or as toys. His women live, act, and suffer, even think; not assertively, mannishly (for the loveliest of them have a very delicate charm of girlishness) but with natural volition, on equal rights with men. Any one who has thought at all on the matter will acknowledge that this is the highest praise that could be given to a poet, and the rarest. Browning's women are not perhaps as various as his men; but from Ottima to Pompilia (from the "great white queen, magnificent in sin," to the "lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf") what a range and gradation of character! These are the two extremes; between them, as earth lies between heaven and hell, are stationed all the others, from the faint and delicate dawn in Pauline, Michal and Palma, through Pippa and Mildred and Colombe and Constance and the Queen, to Balaustion and Elvire, Fifine and Clara and the heroine of the *Inn Album*, and the lurid close in Cristina. I have named only a few, and how many there are to name! Someone has written a book on *Shakespeare's Women:* whoever writes a book on *Browning's Women* will have a task only less delightful, a subject only less rich, than that.

When Browning was a boy, it is recorded that he debated within himself whether he should not become a painter or a musician as well as a poet. Finally, though not, I believe, for a good many years, he decided in the negative. But the latent qualities of painter and musician have developed themselves in his poetry, and much of his finest and very much of his most original verse is that which speaks the language of painter and

musician as it had never before been spoken. No English poet before him has ever excelled his utterances on music, none has so much as rivalled his utterances on art. *Abt Vogler* is the richest, deepest, fullest poem on music in the language. It is not the theories of the poet, but the instincts of the musician, that it speaks. *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha* is unparalleled for ingenuity of technical interpretation ; *A Toccata of Galuppi's* is as rare a rendering as can anywhere be found of the impressions and sensations caused by a musical piece ; but *Abt Vogler* is a very glimpse into the heaven where music is born. In his poems on the arts of painting and sculpture (not in themselves more perfect in sympathy, though larger in number, than those on music) he is simply the first to write of these arts as an artist might, if an artist could express his soul in words or rhythm. It has always been a fashion among poets to write about music, though scarcely anyone but Shakespeare and Milton has done so to much purpose ; it is now, owing to the influence of Rossetti (whose magic, however, was all his own, and whose mantle went down into the grave with him) a fashion to write about pictures. But indiscriminate sonneteering about pictures is one thing : Browning's attitude and insight into the plastic arts quite another. Poems like *Andrea del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Pictor Ignotus*, have a revealing quality which is unique ; tragedies or comedies of art, in a more personal and dramatic way than the musical poems, they are like these in touching the springs of art itself. They may be compared with *Abt Vogler*. Poems of the order of *The Guardian Angel* are more comparable with *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, the rendering of the impressions and sensa-

tions caused by a particular picture. *Old Pictures in Florence* is not unsimilar to *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, critical, technical, lovingly learned, sympathetically quizzical. But Browning's artistic instinct and knowledge are manifested not only in special poems of this sort, but everywhere throughout his works. He writes of painters because he has a kinship with them. "Their pictures are windows through which he sees into their souls."

It is only natural that a poet with the instincts of a painter should be capable of superb landscape-painting in verse; and we find in Browning this power. It is further evident that such a poet, a man who has chosen poetry instead of painting, must consider the latter art subordinate to the former, and it is only natural that we should find Browning subordinating the pictorial to the poetic capacity, and this more carefully than most other poets. His best landscapes are as brief as they are brilliant. They are like sabre-strokes, swift, sudden, flashing the light from their sweep, and striking straight to the heart. And they are never pushed into prominence for an effect of idle beauty, nor strewn about in the way of thoughtful or passionate utterance, like roses in a runner's path. They are subordinated always to the human interest; blended, fused with it, so that a landscape in a poem of Browning's is literally a part of the emotion. All poetry which describes in detail, however magnificent, palls on us when persisted in. "The art of the pen (we write on darkness) is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a Drop-scene brush, as if it were to the eye; because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description. That is why the poets who spring imagination with a word or a phrase paint

lasting pictures. The Shakespearian, the Dantesque, are in a line, two at most."[1] It is to this, the finest essence of landscape-painting, that most of Browning's landscapes belong. Yet he can be as explicit as any one when he sees fit. Look at the poem of *The Englishman in Italy*. The whole piece is one long description, minute, careful and elaborated. Perhaps it is worth observing that the description is addressed to a child.

In the exercise of his power of placing a character or incident in a sympathetic setting, Browning shows himself, as I have pointed out, singularly skilful. He never avails himself of the dramatic poet's licence of vagueness as to surroundings : he sees them himself with instant and intense clearness, and stamps them as clearly on our brain. The picture calls up the mood. Here is the opening of one of his very earliest poems, *Porphyria's Lover* :—

"The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake,
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria."

There, in five lines, is the scene and the mood, and in the sixth line Porphyria may enter. Take a middle-period poem, *A Serenade at the Villa*, for an instance of more deliberate description, flashed by the same fiery art :—

"That was I, you heard last night
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small :
Life was dead and so was light.

[1] George Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*.

Not a twinkle from the fly,
 Not a glimmer from the worm.
When the crickets stopped their cry,
 When the owls forebore a term,
You heard music ; that was I.

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
 Sultrily suspired for proof :
In at heaven and out again,
 Lightning !—where it broke the roof,
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

What they could my words expressed,
 O my love, my all, my one !
Singing helped the verses best,
 And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

So wore night ; the East was gray,
 White the broad-faced hemlock flowers ;
There would be another day ;
 Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had passed away."

This tells enough to be an entire poem. It is not a description of the night and the lover : we are made to see them. The lines I have italicised are of the school of Dante or of Rembrandt. Their vividness overwhelms. In the latest poems, as in *Ivân Ivânovitch* or *Ned Bratts*, we find the same swift sureness of touch. It is only natural that most of Browning's finest landscapes are Italian.[1]

[1] Italians, it is pleasant to remember, have warmly welcomed the poet who has known and loved Italy best. "Her town and country, her churches and her ruins, her sorrows and her hopes," said Prof. Nencioni, as long ago as 1867, "are constantly sung by him. How he loves the land that inspires him he has shown by his long residence among us, and by the thrilling, almost lover-like tone with which he speaks of our dear country. 'Open my heart and you will see, Graved inside of it Italy,' as he exclaims in *De Gustibus*."

As a humorist in poetry, Browning takes rank with our greatest. His humour, like most of his qualities, is peculiar to himself, though no doubt Carlyle had something of it. It is of wide capacity, and ranges from the effervescence of pure fun and freak to that salt and briny laughter whose taste is bitterer than tears. Its full extent will be seen by comparing *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* with *Confessions*, or in the contrast of the two parts of *Holy-Cross Day*. We find the simplest form of humour, the jolly laughter of an unaffected nature, the effervescence of a sparkling and overflowing brain, in such poems as *Up at a Villa—Down in the City*, or *Pacchiarotto*, or *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*. *Fra Lippo Lippi* leans to this category, though it is infused with biting wit and stinging irony; for it is first and foremost the bubbling-up of a restless and irrepressibly comic nature, the born Bohemian compressed but not contained by the rough rope-girdle of the monk. He is Browning's finest figure of comedy. *Ned Bratts* is another admirable creation of true humour, tinged with the grotesque. In *A Lovers' Quarrel* and *Dîs aliter Visum*, humour refines into passion. In *Bishop Blougram* it condenses into wit. The poem has a well-bred irony; in *A Soul's Tragedy* irony smiles and stings; in *Mr. Sludge, the Medium*, it stabs with a thirsty point. In *Caliban upon Setebos* we have the pure grotesque, an essentially noble variety of art, admitting of the utmost refinement of workmanship. The *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* attains a new effect of grotesque: it is the comic tragedy of vituperative malevolence. *Holy-Cross Day* heightens the grotesque with pity, indignation and solemnity: *The Heretic's Tragedy* raises it to sublimity. Browning's satire is equally keen and kindly. It never

condescends to raise laughter at infirmity, or at mere absurdities of manners; it respects human nature, but it convicts falsity by the revealing intensity of its illumination. Of cynicism, of the wit that preys upon carrion, there is less than nothing.

Of all poets Browning is the healthiest and manliest; he is one of the "substantial men" of whom Landor speaks. His genius is robust with vigorous blood, and his tone has the cheeriness of intellectual health. The most subtle of minds, his is the least sickly. The wind that blows in his pages is no hot and languorous breeze, laden with scents and sweets, but a fresh salt wind blowing in from the sea. His poetry is a tonic; it braces and invigorates. "*Il fait vivre ses phrases:*" his verse lives and throbs with life. He is incomparably plentiful of vital heat; "so thoroughly and delightfully alive." This is an effect of art, and a moral impression. It brings us into his own presence, and stirs us with an answering warmth of life in the breathing pages. The keynote of his philosophy is:—

> "God's in his heaven,
> All's right with the world!"

He has such a hopefulness of belief in human nature that he shrinks from no *man*, however clothed and cloaked in evil, however miry with stumblings and fallings. I am a man, he might say with the noblest utterance of antiquity, and I deem nothing alien that is human. His investigations of evil are profoundly consistent with an indomitable optimism. Any one can say "All's right with the world," when he looks at the smiling face of things, at comfortable prosperity and a decent morality.

But the test of optimism is its sight of evil. Browning has fathomed it, and he can still hope, for he sees the reflection of the sun in the depths of every foul puddle. This vivid hope and trust in man is bound up with a strong and strenuous faith in God. Browning's Christianity is wider than our creeds, and is all the more vitally Christian in that it never sinks into pietism. He is never didactic, but his faith is the root of his art, and transforms and transfigures it. Yet as a dramatic poet he is so impartial, and can express all creeds with so easy an interpretative accent, that it is possible to prove him (as Shakespeare has been proved) a believer in everything and a disbeliever in anything.

Such, so far as I can realise my conception of him, is Robert Browning; and such the tenour of his work as a whole. It is time to pass from general considerations to particular ones; from characteristics of the writer to characteristics of the poems. In the pages to follow I shall endeavour to present a critical chronicle of Browning's works; not neglecting to give due information about each, but not confining myself to the mere giving of information. It is hoped that the quotations for which I may find room will practically illustrate and convincingly corroborate what I have to say about the poetry from which they are taken.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POEMS

(1833—1890)

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POEMS

(1833-1890.)

1. Pauline: a Fragment of a Confession.

[Published anonymously in 1833; first reprinted (the text unaltered) in *Poetical Works*, 6 vols., Smith, Elder and Co., 1868 (Vol. I., pp. 1-41); revised text, *Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. I., pp. 1-45.]

Pauline was written at the age of twenty. Its prefatory motto from Cornelius Agrippa (dated "*London, January*, 1833. *V.A.XX.*") serves to convey a hint that the "confession" is dramatic, and at the same time lays claim to the indulgence due to the author's youth. These two points are stated plainly in the "exculpatory word" prefixed to the reprint in 1868. After mentioning the circumstances under which the revival of the poem was forced on him, Browning says:

"The thing was my earliest attempt at 'poetry always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine,' which I have since written according to a scheme less extravagant and scale less impracticable than were ventured upon in this crude preliminary sketch—a sketch that, on reviewal, appears not altogether wide of some hint of the characteristic features of that particular *dramatis persona* it would fain have reproduced: good draughtsmanship, however, and right handling were far beyond the artist at that time."

In a note to the collected edition of 1889, Browning adds:

"Twenty years' endurance of an eyesore seems more than sufficient; my faults remain duly recorded against me, and I claim permission to somewhat diminish these, so far as style is concerned, in the present and final edition."

A revised text follows, in which, while many "faults" are indeed "diminished," it is difficult not to feel at times as if the foot-notes had got into the text.

Pauline is the confession of an unnamed poet to the woman whom he loves, and whose name is given in the title. It is a sort of spiritual autobiography; a record of sensations and ideas, rather than of deeds. "The scenery is in the chambers of thought; the agencies are powers and passions; the events are transitions from one state of spiritual existence to another." There is a vagueness of outline about the speaker which is due partly, no doubt, to the immaturity of the writer, partly also to the too exclusive portraiture of inactive mood. The difficulty is acknowledged in a curious "editor's" note, written in French, and signed "Pauline," in which Browning offered a sort of explanatory criticism of his own work. So far as we can grasp his personality, the speaker appears to us a highly-gifted and on the whole right-natured man, but possessed of a morbid self-consciousness and a limitless yet indecisive ambition. Endowed with a highly poetic nature, yet without, as it seems, adequate concentrative power; filled, at times, with a passionate yearning after God and good, yet morally unstable; he has spent much of his strength in ineffectual efforts, and he is conscious of lamentable failure and mistake in the course of his past life.

Specially does he recognise and mourn his "self-idolatry," which has isolated him from others, and confined him within the close and vitiated circle of his own selfhood. Led by some better impulse, he now turns to Pauline, and to the memory of a great and dearly-loved poet, spoken of as "Sun-treader," finding in these, the memory and the love, a quietude and a redemption.

The poet of the poem is an imaginary character, but it is possible to trace in this character some real traits of its creator. The passage beginning "I am made up of an intensest life" is certainly a piece of admirable self-portraiture; allusions here and there have a personal significance. In this earliest poem we see the germ of almost all the qualities (humour excepted) which mark Browning's mature work. Intensity of religious belief, love of music, of painting, and of the Greek classics; insight into nature, a primary interest in and intense insight into the human soul, these are already manifest. No characteristic is more interesting in the light of long subsequent achievement than the familiarity with Greek literature, shown not merely by the references to Plato and to Agamemnon, but by what is perhaps the finest passage in the poem, the one ending:—

> "Yet I say, never morn broke clear as those
> On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,
> The deep groves and white temples and wet caves:
> And nothing ever will surprise me now—
> Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
> Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair."

The enthusiasm which breathes through whole pages of address to the "Sun-treader" gives no exaggerated

picture of Browning's love and reverence for Shelley, whose *Alastor* might perhaps in some respects be compared with *Pauline*. The rhythm of Browning's poem has a certain echo in it of Shelley's earlier blank verse; and the lyrically emotional descriptions and the vivid and touching metaphors derived from nature frequently remind us of Shelley, and sometimes of Keats. On every page we meet with magical touches like this:—

> "Thou wilt remember one warm morn when winter
> Crept aged from the earth, and spring's first breath
> Blew soft from the moist hills; the black-thorn boughs,
> So dark in the bare wood, when glistening
> In the sunshine were white with coming buds,
> Like the bright side of a sorrow, and the banks
> Had violets opening from sleep like eyes;"

with lines full of exquisite fancy, such as those on the woodland tarn:—

> "The trees bend
> O'er it as wild men watch a sleeping girl;"

and in one place we have a marvellously graphic description, extending over three pages, perhaps the most elaborately painted landscape in Browning's work. It seems like wronging the poem to speak of its *promise*: it is, indeed, far from mature, but it has a superb precocity marking a certain stage of ripeness. It is lacking, certainly, as Browning himself declares, in "good draughtsmanship and right handling," but this defect of youth is richly compensated by the wealth of inspiration, the keen intellectual and ethical insight, and the numberless lines of haunting charm, which have nothing of youth in them but its vigorous freshness.

2. PARACELSUS.

[Published in 1835; first acknowledged work (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. II., pp. 1-186. The original MS. is in the Forster Library at South Kensington.]

The poem is divided into five scenes, each a typical episode in the life of Paracelsus. It is in the form of dialogue between Paracelsus and others: Festus and his wife Michal in the first scene, Aprile, an Italian poet, in the second, and Festus only in the remainder. The poem is followed by an appendix, containing a few notes and a brief biography of Paracelsus, translated from the *Biographie Universelle*.

Paracelsus might be praised, and has justly been praised, for its serious and penetrating quality as an historical study of the great mystic and great man of science, who had realised, before most people, that "matter is the visible body of the invisible God," and who had been the Luther of medicine. But the historical element is less important than the philosophical; both are far less important than the purely poetical. The leading motive is not unlike that of *Pauline* and of *Sordello*: it is handled, however, far more ably than in the former, and much more clearly than in the latter. Paracelsus is a portrait of the seeker after knowledge, one whose ambition transcends all earthly limits, and exhausts itself in the thirst of the impossible. His career is traced from its noble outset at Würzburg to its miserable close in the hospital at Salzburg, through all its course of struggle, conquest and deterioration. His last effort, the superb dying speech, gives the moral of his mistake, and, in the light of the new intuition flashed on his soul by death, the true conception of the powers and limits of man.

The character and mental vicissitudes of Paracelsus are brought out, as has been stated, in dialogue with others. The three minor characters, though probably called into being as mere foils to the protagonist, have a distinct individuality of their own. Michal is Browning's first sketch of a woman. She is faint in outline and very quiet in presence, but though she scarcely speaks twenty lines, her face remains with us like a beautiful face seen once and never to be forgotten. There is something already, in her tentative delineation, of that "piercing and overpowering tenderness which glorifies the poet of Pompilia." Festus, Michal's husband, the friend and adviser of Paracelsus, is a man of simple nature and thoughtful mind, cautious yet not cold, clear-sighted rather than far-seeing, yet not without enthusiasm; perhaps a little narrow and commonplace, as the prudent are apt to be. He, like Michal, has no influence on the external action of the poem. Aprile, the Italian poet whom Paracelsus encounters in the second scene, is an integral part of the poem; for it is through him that a crisis is reached in the development of the seeker after knowledge. Unlike Festus and Michal, he is a type rather than a realisable human being, the type of the Artist pure and simple, the lover of beauty and of beauty alone, a soul immoderately possessed with the desire to love, as Paracelsus with the desire to know. He flickers, an expiring flame, across the pathway of the stronger spirit, one luminous moment and no more.

Paracelsus, though written in dialogue, is not intended to be a drama. This was clearly stated in the preface to the first edition, an important document, never afterwards reprinted. "Instead of having recourse," wrote Browning,

"to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded."[1] The proportions of the work are epical rather than dramatic; but indeed it is difficult to class, so exuberant is the vitality which fills and overflows all limits. What is not a drama, though in dialogue, nor yet an epic, except in length, can scarcely be considered, any more than its successors, and perhaps imitators, *Festus*, *Balder*, or *A Life Drama*, properly artistic in form. But it is distinguished from this prolific progeny not only by a finer and firmer imagination, a truer poetic richness, but by a moderation, a concreteness, a grip, which are certainly all its own. In few of Browning's poems are there so many individual lines and single passages which we are so apt to pause on, to read again and again, for the mere enjoyment of their splendid sound and colour. And this for a reason. The large and lofty character of Paracelsus, the avoidance of much external detail, and the high tension at which thought and emotion are kept throughout, permit the poet to use his full resources of style and diction without producing an effect of unreality and extravagance. We meet on almost every page with lines like these:—

> "Ask the gier-eagle why she stoops at once
> Into the vast and unexplored abyss,
> What full-grown power informs her from the first,
> Why she not marvels, strenuously beating
> The silent boundless regions of the sky."

---

[1] See the whole Preface, Appendix II.

Or again, lines like these, which have become the watchword of a Gordon :—

> "I go to prove my soul !
> I see my way as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive ! what time, what circuit first,
> I ask not : but unless God send his hail
> Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
> In some time, his good time, I shall arrive :
> He guides me and the bird. In his good time !"

At times the brooding splendour bursts forth in a kind of vast ecstasy, and we have such magnificence as this :—

> "The centre fire heaves underneath the earth,
> And the earth changes like a human face ;
> The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,
> Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright
> In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,
> Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask—
> God joys therein. The wroth sea's waves are edged
> With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate,
> When, in the solitary waste, strange groups
> Of young volcanos come up, cyclops-like,
> Staring together with their eyes on flame—
> God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride.
> Then all is still ; earth is a wintry clod :
> But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
> Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
> Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
> The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
> Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face ;
> The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms
> Like chrysalids impatient for the air,
> The shining dorrs are busy, beetles run
> Along the furrows, ants make their ado ;
> Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
> Soars up and up, shivering for very joy ;
> Afar the ocean sleeps ; white fishing-gulls

Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
His ancient rapture."

The blank verse of *Paracelsus* is varied by four lyrics, themselves various in style, and full of rare music: the spirit song of the unfaithful poets—

"The sad rhyme of the men who sadly clung
To their first fault, and withered in their pride,"

the gentle song of the Mayne river, and that strange song of old spices which haunts the brain like a perfume:—

"Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smeared with dull nard an Indian wipes
From out her hair: such balsam falls
Down sea-side mountain pedestals,
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island gain.

And strew faint sweetness from some old
Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
From closet long to quiet vowed,
With mothed and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead was young."

3. STRAFFORD: an Historical Tragedy.

[Written toward the close of 1836; acted at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden (*Strafford*, Mr. Macready; *Countess of Carlisle*, Miss Helen Faucit), May 1, 1837; by the Browning Society at the Strand Theatre, Dec. 21, 1886, and at Oxford by the O.U.D.S. in 1890; published in 1837 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. II., pp. 187-307).]

Strafford was written, at Macready's earnest request, in an interval of the composition of *Sordello*. Like all Browning's plays which were acted, it owed its partial failure to causes quite apart from its own merits or defects as a play.[1] Browning may not have had the making of a good playwright; but at least no one ever gave him the chance of showing whether he was or not. The play is not without incident, especially in the third act. But its chief merit lies in the language and style of the dialogue. There is no aim at historical dignity or poetical elaboration; the aim is nature, quick with personal passion. Every word throbs with emotion; through these exclamatory, yet how delicate and subtle lines, we seem actually to see and hear the speakers, and with surprising vividness. The words supply their own accents, looks and gestures.

In his preface to the first edition (reprinted in Appendix II.) Browning states that he believes the historical portraits to be faithful. This is to a considerable extent confirmed by Professor Gardiner, who has given a careful consideration of the play in its historical aspects, in his Introduction to Miss Hickey's annotated edition (G. Bell & Sons, 1884). As a representation of history, he tells us, it is inaccurate; "the very roots of the situation are untrue to fact." But (as he allows) this departure from fact, in the conduct of the action, is intentional, and, of course, allowable: Browning was writing a drama, not a history. Of the portraits, the really vital part of the play as an interpretation of history, he writes:—

[1] See *Robert Browning: Personalia*, by Edmund Gosse (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1890).

"For myself, I can only say that, every time I read the play, I feel more convinced that Mr. Browning has seized the real Strafford, the man of critical brain, of rapid decision, and tender heart, who strove for the good of his nation, without sympathy for the generation in which he lived. Charles, too, with his faults perhaps exaggerated, is, nevertheless, a real Charles. . . . There is a wonderful parallelism between the Lady Carlisle of the play and the less noble Lady Carlisle which history conjectures rather than describes. . . . . On the other hand, Pym is the most unsatisfactory, from an historical point of view, of the leading personages."

Yet, if it is interesting, it is by no means of primary importance to know the historical basis and probable accuracy of Browning's play. The whole interest is centred in the character of Strafford; it is a personal interest, and attaches itself to the personal character of the hero. The leading motive is Strafford's devotion to his king, and the note of tragic discord arises from the ingratitude and faithlessness of Charles set over against the blind fidelity of his minister. The antagonism of law and despotism, of Pym and Strafford, is, perhaps, less clearly and forcibly brought out: though essential to the plot, it wears to our sight a somewhat secondary aspect. Strafford himself appears not so much a superb and unbending figure, a political power, as a man whose service of Charles is due wholly to an intense personal affection, and not at all to his national sympathies, which seem, indeed, rather on the opposite side. He loves the man, not the king, and his love is a freak of the affections. That it is against his better reason he recognises, but the recognition fails to influence his heart or his conduct. This is finely expressed in the following lines, spoken by Lady Carlisle:—

"Could you but know what 'tis to bear, my friend,
One image stamped within you, turning blank
The else imperial brilliance of your mind,—
A weakness, but most precious,—like a flaw
I' the diamond, which should shape forth some sweet face
Yet to create, and meanwhile treasured there
Lest nature lose her gracious thought for ever!"

Browning has rarely drawn a more pathetic figure. Every circumstance that could contribute to this effect is skilfully seized and emphasised: Charles's incredibly selfish weakness, the implacable sternness of Pym, the *triste* prattle of Strafford's children and their interrupted joyous song in the final scene, all serve to heighten our feeling of affectionate pity and regret. The imaginary former friendship between Pym and Strafford adds still more to the pathos of the delineation, and gives rise to some of the finest speeches, notably the last great colloquy between these two, which so effectively rounds and ends the play. The fatal figure of Pym is impressive and admirable throughout, and the portrait of the Countess of Carlisle, Browning's second portrait of a woman, is a noble and singularly original one. Her unrecognised and undeterred devotion to Strafford is finely and tenderly pathetic; it has the sorrowful dignity of faithful service, rewarded only in serving.

4. SORDELLO.

[Published in 1840 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. I., pp. 47-289).]

Sordello is generally spoken of as being the most obscure and the least attractive of Browning's poems; it has even been called "the most illegible production of any time or country." Hard, very hard, it un-

doubtedly is; but undoubtedly it is far from unattractive to the serious student of poetry, who will find in it something of the fascination of an Alpine peak: not to be gained without an effort, treacherous and slippery, painfully dazzling to weak eyes, but for all that irresistibly fascinating. *Sordello* contains enough poetic material for a dozen considerable poems; indeed, its very fault lies in its plethora of ideas, the breathless crowd of hurrying thoughts and fancies, which fill and overflow it. That this is not properly to be called "obscurity" has been triumphantly shown by Mr. Swinburne in his essay on George Chapman. Some of his admirable statements I have already quoted, but we may bear to be told twice that Browning is too much the reverse of obscure, that he is only too brilliant and subtle, that he never thinks but at full speed. But besides this characteristic, which is common to all his work, there are one or two special reasons which have made this particular poem more difficult than others. The condensation of style which had marked Browning's previous work, and which has marked his later, was here (in consequence of an unfortunate and most unnecessary dread of verbosity, induced by a rash and foolish criticism) accentuated not infrequently into dislocation. The very unfamiliar historical events of the story[1] are introduced, too, in a parenthetic and allusive way, not a little embarrassing to the reader.

[1] "Mr. Browning prepared himself for writing *Sordello*," says Mrs. Orr, "by studying all the chronicles of that period of Italian history which the British Museum contained; and we may be sure that every event he alludes to as historical, is so in spirit, if not in the letter; while such details as come under the head of historical curiosities are absolutely true. He also supplemented his reading by a visit to the places in which the scenes of the story are laid."—*Handbook*, p. 31.

But it is also evident that the difficulties of a gigantic conception were not completely conquered by the writer's genius, not then fully matured; that lack of entire mastery over the material has frequently caused the two interests of the poem, the psychological and the historical, to clash; the background to intrude on and confuse the middle distance, if not even the foreground itself. Every one of these faults is the outcome of a merit: altogether they betray a growing nature of extraordinary power, largeness and richness, not as yet to be bound or contained within any limits or in any bonds.

Sordello is a psychological epic. But to call it this only would be to do it somewhat less than justice. There is in the poem a union of breathless eagerness with brooding suspense, which has an almost unaccountable fascination for those who once come under its charm, and nowhere in Browning's work are there so many pictures, so vivid in aspect, so sharp in outline, so rich in colour. At their best they are sudden, a flash of revelation, as in this autumnal Goito:—

> "'Twas the marsh
> Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,
> Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
> And, where the mists broke up immense and white
> I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light,
> Out of the crashing of a myriad stars."

Verona, by torchfire, seen from a window, is shown with the same quick flare out of darkness:—

> "Then arose the two
> And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.
> A balcony lay black beneath until

Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, grey-haired men
Came on it and harangued the people : then
Sea-like that people surging to and fro
Shouted."

Only Carlyle, in the most vivid moments of his *French Revolution*, has struck such flashes out of darkness. And there are other splendours and rarities, not only in the evocation of actual scenes and things, but in mere similes, like this, in which the quality of imagination is of a curiously subtle and unusual kind:—

"As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot
Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
Enormous watercourse which guides him back
To his own tribe again, where he is king :
And laughs because he guesses, numbering
The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch
Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert-blast)
That he has reached its boundary, at last
May breathe ;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South
Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,
Eyes, nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried
In fancy, puts them soberly aside
For truth, projects a cool return with friends,
The likelihood of winning mere amends
Ere long ; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,
Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon."

And, while much of the finest poetry is contained in picturesque passages such as these, we find verse of another order, thrilling as the trumpet's "golden cry,"

in the passionate invocation of Dante, enshrining the magnificently Dantesque characterization of the three divisions of the *Divina Commedia.*

> "For he—for he,
> Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,
> (If I should falter now)—for he is thine!
> Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine!
> A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
> Relentless into the consummate orb
> That scared it from its right to roll along
> A sempiternal path with dance and song
> Fulfilling its allotted period,
> Serenest of the progeny of God—
> Who yet resigns it not! His darling stoops
> With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops
> Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
> Utterly with thee, its shy element
> Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear.
> Still, what if I approach the august sphere
> Named now with only one name, disentwine
> That under-current soft and argentine
> From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
> Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass
> In John's transcendent vision,—launch once more
> That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
> Where glutted hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
> Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
> Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
> Into a darkness quieted by hope;
> Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
> In gracious twilights where his chosen lie,
> I would do this! If I should falter now!"

Browning has himself told us that his stress lay on the "incidents in the development of a soul." The portrait of Sordello is one of the most elaborate and complete which he has given us. It is painted with

more accessory detail and on a larger canvas than any other single figure. Like *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, with which it has points of affinity, the poem is a study of ambition and of egoism; of a soul "whose ambition," as it has been rightly said, "is in extravagant disproportion to its physical powers and means, and whose temptation is at every crisis to seek pleasure in the picture of willing and doing rather than in willing and doing itself." Sordello's youth is fed upon fancy: he imagines himself Apollo, this or that hero of the time; in dreams he is and does to the height of his aspirations. But from any actual doing he shrinks; at the approach or the call of action, his will refuses to act. We might sum up his character in a general sense by saying that his imagination overpowers every other faculty; an imagination intensely personal, a sort of intellectual egoism, which removes him equally from action and from sympathy. He looks on men as foils to himself, or as a background on which to shine. But the root of his failure is this, and it is one which could never be even apprehended by a vulgar egoism: he longs to grasp the whole of life at once, to realise his aims in their entirety, without complying with the necessary conditions. His mind perceives the infinite and essential so clearly that it scorns or spurns the mere accidents. But earth being earth, and life growth, and accidents an inevitable part of life, the rule remains that man, to attain, must climb step by step, and not expect to fly at once to the top of the ladder. Finding that he cannot do everything, Sordello sees no alternative but to do nothing. Consequently his state comes to be a virtual indolence or inactivity; though it is in reality

that of the top, spinning so fast that its motion is imperceptible. Poet and man of action, for he contains more than the germ of both, confound and break down one another. He meets finally with a great temptation, conquers it, but dies of the effort. For the world his life has been a failure, for himself not absolutely so, since, before his eyes were closed, he was permitted to see the truth and to recognise it. But in all his aims, in all his ambitions, he has failed; and the world has gained nothing from them or from him but the warning of his example.

This Sordello of Browning seems to have little identity with the brief and splendid Sordello of Dante, the figure that fronts us in the superb sixth canto of the *Purgatoria*, "a guisa di leon quando si posa." The records of the real Sordello are scant, fragmentary and contradictory. No coherent outline of his personality remains, so that the character which Browning has made for him is a creation as absolute as if it had been wholly invented. The name indeed of Sordello, embalmed in Dante's verse, is still fresh to our ears after the "ravage of six long sad hundred years," and it is Dante, too, who in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, has further signalised him by honourable record. Sordello, he says, excelled in all kinds of composition, and by his experiments in the dialects of Cremona, Brescia and Verona, cities near Mantua, helped to form the Tuscan tongue. But besides the brief record of Dante, there are certain accounts of Sordello's life, very confused and conflicting, in the early Italian Chronicles and the Provençal lives of the Troubadours. Tiraboschi sifts these legends, leaving very little of them. According

to him, Sordello was a Mantuan of noble family, born at Goito at the close of the twelfth century. He was a poet and warrior, though not, as some reports profess, captain-general or governor of Mantua. He eloped with Cunizza, the wife of Count Richard of St. Boniface; at some period of his life he went into Provence; and he died a violent death, about the middle of the thirteenth century. The works attributed to him are poems in Tuscan and Provençal, a didactic poem in Latin named *Thesaurus Thesaurorum* (now in the Ambrosiana in Milan), an essay in Provençal on "The Progress and Power of the Kings of Aragon in the Comté of Provence," a treatise on "The Defence of Walled Towns," and some historial translations from Latin into the vulgar tongue. Of all these works only the *Thesaurus* and some thirty-four poems in Provençal, *sirventes* and *tensons*, survive: some of the finest of them are satires.[1]

The statement that Sordello was specially famed for his philosophical verses, though not confirmed by what remains of his poetry, is interesting and significant in connection with Browning's conception of his character. There is little however in the scanty tales we have of the historic Sordello to suggest the "feverish poet" of the poem. The fugitive personality of the half mythical fighting poet eludes the grasp, and Browning has rather given the name of Sordello to an imagined type of the poetic character than constructed a type of character to fit the name. Still less are the dubious attributes with

[1] Of all these matters, and of all else that is known of Sordello, a good and sympathetic account will be found in Mr. Eugene Benson's little book on *Sordello and Cunizza* (Dent, 1903).

which the bare facts of history or legend invest Cunizza (whom, none the less, Dante spoke with in heaven) recognisable in the exquisite and all-golden loveliness of Palma.

5. Pippa Passes.

[Published in 1841 as No. 1 of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. III., pp. 1-79).]

Pippa Passes is Browning's most perfect work, and here, more perhaps than in anything he ever wrote, he wrote to please himself. As a whole, he has never written anything to equal it in artistic symmetry; while a single scene, that between Ottima and Sebald, reaches the highest level of tragic utterance which he has ever attained. The plan of the work, in which there are elements of the play and elements of the masque, is a wholly original one: a series of scenes, connected only by the passing through them of a single person, who is outside their action, and whose influence on that action is unconscious. "Mr Browning," says Mrs. Sutherland Orr in the *Handbook*, "was walking alone in a wood near Dulwich, when the image flashed upon him of some one walking thus alone through life; one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it; and the image shaped itself into the little silk-winder of Asolo, Felippa or Pippa."[1] It is this motive that makes unity in variety, linking together a sequence of otherwise independent scenes. The poem is the story of Pippa's New Year's Day holiday, her one holiday in the year. She resolves to fancy herself to be

[1] *Handbook*, p. 54.

in turn the four happiest people in Asolo, and, to realise her fancy as much as she can, she spends her day in wandering about the town, passing, in the morning, the shrub-house up the hillside, where Ottima and her lover Sebald have met; at noon, the house of Jules, over Orcana; in the evening, the turret on the hill above Asolo, where are Luigi and his mother; and at night, the palace by the Duomo, now tenanted by Monsignor the Bishop. These, whom she imagines to be the happiest people in the town, have all, in reality, arrived at crises of tremendous and tragic importance to themselves, and, in one instance, to her. Each stands at the turning-point of a life: Ottima and Sebald, unrepentant, with a crime behind them; Jules and Phene, two souls brought strangely face to face by a fate which may prove their salvation or their perdition; Luigi, irresolute, with a purpose to be performed; Monsignor, undecided, before a great temptation. Pippa passes, singing, at the moment when these souls' tragedies seem tending to a fatal end, at the moment when the baser nature seems about to triumph over the better. Something in the song, "like any flash that cures the blind," strikes them with a sudden light; each decides, suddenly; each, according to the terms of his own nature, is saved. And Pippa passes, unconscious of the influence she has exerted, as they are but half-aware of the agency of what they take as an immediate word from God. Each of these four scenes is in dialogue, the first three in blank verse, the last in prose. Between each is an interlude, in prose or verse, representing the "talk by the way," of art-students, Austrian police, and poor girls, all bearing on some part of the action. Pippa's prologue

and epilogue, like her songs, are in varied lyric verse. The blank verse throughout is the most vivid and dignified, the most coloured and yet restrained, that Browning ever wrote; and he never wrote anything better for singing than some of Pippa's songs.

Of the four principal scenes, by far the greatest is the first, that between Ottima and her paramour, the German Sebald, on the morning after the murder of old Luca Gaddi, the woman's husband. It is difficult to convey in words any notion of its supreme excellence of tragic truth: to match it we must revert to almost the very finest Elizabethan work. The representation of Ottima and Sebald, the Italian and the German, is a singularly acute study of the Italian and German races. Sebald, in a sudden access of brutal rage, has killed the old doting husband, but his conscience, too feeble to stay his hand before, is awake to torture him after the deed. But Ottima is steadfast in evil, with the Italian conscienceless resoluteness. She can no more feel either fear or remorse than Clytæmnestra. The scene between Jules, the French sculptor, and his bride Phene, and that between Luigi, the light-headed Italian patriot, and his mother, are less great indeed, less tragic and intense and overpowering, than this crowning episode; but they are scarcely less fine and finished in a somewhat slighter style. Both are full of colour and music, of insight into nature and into art, and of superb lines and passages, such as this, which is spoken by Luigi:—

> "God must be glad one loves his world so much.
> I can give news of earth to all the dead
> Who ask me:—last year's sunsets, and great stars
> That had a right to come first and see ebb

The crimson wave that drifts the sun away—
Those crescent moons with notched and burning rims
That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
Impatient of the azure—and that day
In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm—
May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights—
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!"

But in neither is there any single passage of such incomparable quality as the thunderstorm in the first scene, a storm not to be matched in English poetry:—

"Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;
And ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burned through the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,
As if God's messenger through the close wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke
The thunder like a whole sea overhead."

The vivid colloquial scenes in prose have much of that pungent semi-satirical humour of which Browning had shown the first glimpse in *Sordello*. Besides these, there is one intermediate scene in verse, the talk of the "poor girls" on the Duomo steps, which seems to me one of the most pathetic things ever written by the most pathetic of contemporary poets. It is this scene that contains the exquisite song, "You'll love me yet."

"You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartful now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like.

You'll look at least on love's remains,
  A grave's one violet :
Your look ?—that pays a thousand pains.
  What's death ? You'll love me yet ! "

6. King Victor and King Charles : A Tragedy.

[Published in 1842 as No. II. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, although written some years earlier (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. III., pp. 81-165).]

King Victor and King Charles is an historical tragedy, dealing with the last episode in the career of Victor II., first King of Sardinia. Browning says in his preface :

" So far as I know, this tragedy is the first artistic consequence of what Voltaire termed 'a terrible event without consequences ;' and although it professes to be historical, I have taken more pains to arrive at the history than most readers would thank me for particularising : since acquainted, as I will hope them to be, with the chief circumstances of Victor's remarkable European career—nor quite ignorant of the sad and surprising facts I am about to reproduce (a tolerable account of which is to be found, for instance, in Abbé Roman's *Récit*, or even the fifth of Lord Orrery's *Letters from Italy*)—I cannot expect them to be versed, nor desirous of becoming so, in all the details of the memoirs, correspondence, and relations of the time. . . . When I say, therefore, that I cannot but believe my statement (combining as it does what appears correct in Voltaire and plausible in Condorcet) more true to person and thing than any it has hitherto been my fortune to meet with, no doubt my word will be taken, and my evidence spared as readily."

The episode recorded in the play is the abdication of Victor in favour of his son Charles, and his subsequent attempt to return to the throne. The only point in which Browning has departed from history is that the very effective death on the stage replaces the old king's

real death in captivity a year later. As a piece of literature, this is the least interesting and valuable of Browning's plays, the thinnest in structure, the dryest in substance.

The interest of the play is, even more than that of *Strafford*, political. The intrigue turns on questions of government, complicated with questions of relationship and duty. The conflict is one between ruler and ruler, who are also father and son; and the true tragedy of the situation seems to be this: shall Charles obey the instincts of a son, and cede to his father's wish to resume the government he has abdicated, or is there a higher duty which he is bound to follow, the duty of a king to his people? The motive is a fine one, but it is scarcely handled with Browning's accustomed skill and subtlety. King Victor, of whose "fiery and audacious temper, unscrupulous selfishness, profound dissimulation, and singular fertility in resources," Browning speaks in his preface, is an impressive study of "the old age of crafty men," the futile wiliness of decrepit and persevering craft, though we are scarcely made to feel the once potent personality of the man, or to understand the influence which his mere word or presence still has upon his son. D'Ormea, who checkmates all the schemes of his old master, is a curious and subtle study of one who "serves God at the devil's bidding," as he himself confesses in the cynical frankness of his continual ironical self-criticism. After twenty years of unsuccessful intrigue, he has learnt by experience that honesty is the best policy. But at every step his evil reputation clogs and impedes his honest action, and the very men whom he is now most sincere in helping are the most mistrust-

ful of his sincerity. Charles, whose good intentions and vacillating will are the precise opposites of his father's strong will and selfish purposes, is really the central figure of the play. He is one of those men whom we at once despise and respect. Gifted with many good qualities, he seems to lack the one thing needful to bind them together. Polyxena, his wife, possesses just that resolution in which he is wanting. She is a fine, firm, clear character, herself admirable, and admirably drawn. Her "noble and right woman's manliness" (to use Browning's phrase) is prompt to sweep away the cobwebs that entangle her husband's path or obscure his vision of things. From first to last she sees through Charles, Victor and D'Ormea, who neither understand one another nor perhaps themselves; from first to last she is the same clear-headed, decisive, consistent woman, loyal always to love, but always yet more loyal toward truth.

7. Dramatic Lyrics.[1]

[Published in 1842 as No. III. of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, dispersedly in Vols. IV., V., and VI.).]

Dramatic Lyrics, Browning's first volume of short poems, contains some of his finest, and many of his most popular pieces. The little volume, it was only sixteen pages in length, has, however, an importance even beyond

[1] It should be stated here that the three collections of miscellaneous poems published in 1842, 1845 and 1855, and named respectively *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, and *Men and Women*, were in 1863 broken up and the poems re-distributed. I shall take the volumes as they originally appeared; a reference to the list of contents of the edition of 1863, given in the Bibliography at the end of this book, will enable the reader to find any poem in its present locality.

its actual worth; for we can trace in it the germ at least of most of Browning's subsequent work. We see in these poems for the first time that extraordinary mastery of rhyme which Butler himself has not excelled; that predilection for the grotesque which is shared by no other English poet; and, not indeed for the first time, but for the first time with any special prominence, the strong and thoughtful humour, running up and down the whole compass of its gamut, gay and hearty, satirical and incisive, in turn. We see also the first formal beginning of the dramatic monologue, which, hinted at in *Pauline*, disguised in *Paracelsus*, and developed, still disguised, in *Sordello*, became, from the period of the *Dramatic Lyrics* onward, the staple form and special instrument of the poet, an instrument finely touched, at times, by other performers, but of which he is the only Liszt. The literal beginning of the monologue must be found in two lyrical poems, here included, *Johannes Agricola* and *Porphyria's Lover* (originally named *Madhouse Cells*), which were published in a magazine as early as 1836, or about the time of the publication of *Paracelsus*. These extraordinary little poems reveal not only an imagination of intense fire and heat, but an almost finished art: a power of conceiving subtle mental complexities with clearness and of expressing them in a picturesque form and in perfect lyric language. Each poem renders a single mood, and renders it completely. But it is still only a mood: *My Last Duchess* is a life. This poem (it was at first one of two companion pieces called *Italy and France*) is the first direct progenitor of *Andrea del Sarto* and the other great blank verse monologues; in it we see the form, save for the scarcely appreciable presence of rhyme,

already developed. The poem is a subtle study in the jealousy of egoism, not a study so much as a creation; and it places before us, as if bitten in by the etcher's acid, a typical autocrat of the Renaissance, with his serene self-composure of selfishness, quiet uncompromising cruelty, and genuine devotion to art. The scene and the actors in this little Italian drama stand out before us with the most natural clearness; there is some telling touch in every line, an infinitude of cunningly careless details, instinct with suggestion, and an appearance through it all of simple artless ease, such as only the very finest art can give. But let the poem speak for itself.

"My Last Duchess.

"FERRARA.

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark,'—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!"

A poem of quite another order of art, a life-like sketch rather than a creation, is found in *Waring*. The

original of Waring was one of Browning's friends, Alfred Domett, the author of *Ranolf and Amohia*, then or afterwards Prime Minister in New Zealand.[1] The poem is written in a free and familiar style, which rises from time to time into a kind of precipitate brilliance; it is more personal in detail than Browning often allows himself to be; and its humour is blithe and friendly. In another poem, now known as *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, the humour is grotesque, bitter and pungent, the humour of hate. The snarling monk of the Spanish cloister pours out on poor, innocent, unsuspecting "Brother Lawrence" a wealth of really choice and masterly vituperation, not to be matched out of Shakespeare. The poem is a clever study of that mood of active disgust which most of us have felt toward some possibly inoffensive enough person, whose every word, look or action jars on the nerves. It flashes, too, a brilliant comic light on the natural tendencies of asceticism. Side by side with this poem, under the general name of *Camp and Cloister*, was published the vigorous and touching little ballad now known as *Incident of the French Camp*, a stirring lyric of war, such as Browning has always been able, rarely as he has cared, to write. The ringing *Cavalier Tunes* (so graphically set to music by Sir C. Villiers Stanford) strike the same note; so, too, does the wonderfully clever little riding poem, *Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr*, a *tour de force* strung together on a single rhyme: "As I ride, as I ride."

Count Gismond, the companion of *My Last Duchess*, is

[1] See *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett.* Edited by F. G. Kenyon. (Smith, Elder & Co., 1906).

a vivid little tale, told with genuine sympathy with the mediæval spirit. It is almost like an anticipation of some of the remarkable studies of the Middle Ages contained in Morris's first and best book of poems, *The Defence of Guenevere*, published sixteen years later. The mediæval temper of entire confidence in the ordeal by duel has never been better rendered than in these two stanzas, the very kernel of the poem, spoken by the falsely-accused girl :—

". . . Till out strode Gismond ; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan ; who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end ?

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead."[1]

Of the two aspects of *Queen Worship*, one, *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*, has a mournfully sweet pathos in its lingering lines, and *Cristina*, not without a touch of vivid passion, contains that personal conviction afterwards enshrined in the lovelier casket of *Evelyn Hope*. *Artemis Prologuizes* is Browning's only experiment in the classic style. The fragment was meant to form part of a longer

[1] It is worth noticing, as a curious point in Browning's technique, that in the stanza (*ababcc*) in which this and some of his other poems are written, he almost always omits the pause customary at the end of the fourth line, running it into the fifth, and thus producing a novel metrical effect, such as we find used with success in more than one poem of Carew.

work, which was to take up the legend of Hippolytus at the point where Euripides dropped it. The project was no doubt abandoned for the same wise reasons which led Keats to leave unfinished a lovelier experiment in *Hyperion*. It was in this poem that Browning first adopted the Greek spelling of proper names, a practice which he has since carried out, with greater consistency, in his transcripts from Æschylus and Euripides.

Perhaps the finest of the *Dramatic Lyrics* is the little lyric tragedy, *In a Gondola*, a poem which could hardly be surpassed in its perfect union or fusion of dramatic intensity with charm and variety of music. It was suggested by a picture of Maclise, and tells of two Venetian lovers, watched by a certain jealous "Three"; of their brief hour of happiness, and of the sudden vengeance of the Three. There is a brooding sense of peril over all the blithe and flitting fancies said or sung to one another by the lovers in their gondola; a sense, however, of future rather than of present peril, something of a zest and a piquant pleasure to them. The sudden tragic ending, anticipated yet unexpected, rounds the whole with a dramatic touch of infallible instinct. I know nothing with which the poem may be compared: its method and its magic are alike its own. We might hear it or fancy it perhaps in one of the Ballades of Chopin, with its entrancing harmonies, its varied and delicate ornamentation, its under-tone of passion and sadness, its storms and gusts of wind-like lashing notes, and the piercing shiver that thrills through its suave sunshine.

It is hardly needful, I hope, to say anything in praise of the last of the *Dramatic Lyrics*, the incomparable child's

story of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*,[1] "a thing of joy for ever," as it has been well said, "to all with the child's heart, young and old." This poem, probably the most popular of Browning's poems, was written for William Macready, the son of the actor, and was thrown into the volume at the last moment, for the purpose of filling up the sheet.

8. The Return of the Druses: A Tragedy in Five Acts.

[Published in 1843 as No. IV. of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. III., pp. 167-255). Written in 1840 (in five days), and named in MS. *Mansoor the Hierophant*. The action takes place during one day.]

The story of *The Return of the Druses* is purely imaginary as to facts, but it is founded on the Druse belief in divine incarnations, a belief inculcated by the founder of their religion, Hakeem Biamr Allah, the sixth Fatemite Caliph of Egypt, whose pretension to be an incarnation of the Divinity was stamped in the popular mind by his mysterious disappearance, and the expectation of his glorious return. Browning here gives the rein to his fervid and passionate imagination; in event, in character, in expression, the play is romantic, lyrical and Oriental. The first line—

"The moon is carried off in purple fire,—"

sounds the note of the new music; and to the last line

[1] Browning's authority for the story, which is told in many quarters, was North Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World*, 1678, and the books there cited.

the emotion is sustained at the same height. Passionate, rapid, vivid, intense and picturesque, no stronger contrast could be imagined than that which exists between this drama and *King Victor and King Charles*. The cause of the difference must be sought in the different nature of the two subjects, for one of Browning's most eminent qualities is his care in harmonising treatment with subject. *King Victor and King Charles* is a modern play, dealing with human nature under all the restrictions of a pervading conventionality and an oppressive statecraft. It deals, moreover, with complex and weakened emotions, with the petty and prosaic details of a secondary Western government. *The Return of the Druses*, on the other hand, treats of human nature in its most romantic conditions, of the mystic East, of great and immediate issues, of the most inspiring of crises, a revolt for liberty, and a revolt under the leadership of a "Messiah," about whom hangs a mystery, and a reputation of more than mortal power. The characters, like the language, are all somewhat idealised. Djabal, the protagonist, is the first instance of a character specially fascinating to Browning as an artistic subject: the deceiver of others or of himself who is only partially insincere, and not altogether ill-intentioned. Djabal is an impostor almost wholly for the sake of others. He is a patriotic Druse, the son of the last Emir, supposed to have perished in the massacre of the Sheikhs, but preserved when a child and educated in Europe. His sole aim is to free his nation from its bondage, and lead it back to Lebanon. But in order to strengthen the people's trust in him, and to lead them back in greater

glory, he pretends that he is "Hakeem," their divine, predestined deliverer. The delusion grows upon himself; he succeeds triumphantly, but in the very moment of triumph he loses faith in himself, the imposture is all but discovered, and he dies, a victim of what was wrong in him, while the salt of his noble and successful purpose keeps alive his memory among his people. In striking contrast with Djabal stands Loys, the frank, bright, young Breton knight, with his quick, generous heart, his chivalrous straightforwardness of thought and action, his earnest pity for the oppressed Druses, and his passionate love for the Druse maiden Anael. Anael herself is one of the most "actual yet uncommon" of the poet's women. She is a true daughter of the East, to the finest fibre of her being. Her tender and fiery soul burns upward through error and crime with a leaping, quenchless flame. She loves Djabal, believing him to be "Hakeem" and divine, with a love which seems to her too human, too much the love evoked by a mere man's nature. Her attempt at adoration only makes him feel more keenly the fact of his imposture. Misunderstanding his agitation and the broken words he lets drop, she fancies he despises her, and feels impelled to do some great deed, and so exalt herself to be worthy of him. Fired with enthusiasm, she anticipates his crowning act, the act of liberation, and herself slays the tyrannical Prefect. The magnificent scene in which this occurs is the finest in the play, and there is a singularly impressive touch of poetry and stagecraft in a certain line of it, where Djabal and Anael meet, at the moment when she has done the deed which he is waiting

to do. Unconscious of what she has done, he tells her to go :—

> "I slay him here,
> And here you ruin all. Why speak you not?
> Anael, the Prefect comes!" [ANAEL *screams.*]

There is drama in this stage direction. With this involuntary scream (and the shudder and start aside one imagines, to see if the dead man really is coming) a great actress might thrill an audience. Djabal, horror-stricken at what she has done, confesses to her that he is no Hakeem, but a mere man. After the first revulsion of feeling, her love, hitherto questioned and hampered by her would-be adoration, burst forth with a fuller flood. But she expects him to confess to the tribe. Djabal refuses: he will carry through his scheme to the end. In the first flush of her indignation at his unworthiness, she denounces him. In the final scene occurs another wonderful touch of nature, a touch which reminds one of Desdemona's "Nobody: I myself," in its divine and adorable self-sacrifice of truth. Learning what Anael has done, Djabal is about to confess his imposture to the people, who are still under his fascination, when Anael, all her old love (not her old belief) returning upon her, cries with her last breath, "HAKEEM!" and dies upon the word. The Druses grovel before him; as he still hesitates, the trumpet of his Venetian allies sounds. Turning to Khalil, Anael's brother, he bids him take his place and lead the people home, accompanied and guarded by Loys. "We follow!" cry the Druses, "now exalt thyself!"

> "*Dja.* [*bends over* ANAEL.] And last to thee!
> Ah, did I dream I was to have, this day,

Exalted thee? A vain dream—has thou not
Won greater exaltation? What remains
But press to thee, exalt myself to thee?
Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul!
[*He stabs himself; as he falls, supported by* KHALIL *and* LOYS, *the Venetians enter: the* ADMIRAL *advances.*
Admiral. God and St. Mark for Venice! Plant the Lion!
[*At the clash of the planted standard, the Druses shout and move tumultuously forward,* LOYS, *drawing his sword.*
Dja. [*leading them a few steps between* KHALIL *and* LOYS.]
On to the Mountain! At the Mountain, Druses! [*Dies.*]"

This superb last scene shows how well Browning is able, when he likes, to render the tumultuous action of a clashing crowd of persons and interests. The whole fourth and fifth acts are specially fine; every word comes from the heart, every line is pregnant with emotion.

9. A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON: A Tragedy in Three Acts.

[Published in 1843 as No. V. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, written in five days (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. IV., pp. 1-70). Played originally at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, February 11, 1843 (*Mildred*, Miss Helen Faucit; *Lord Tresham*, Mr. Phelps). Revived by Mr. Phelps at Sadler's Wells, November 27, 1848; played at Boston, U.S., March 16, 1885, under the management of Mr. Lawrence Barrett, who took the part of *Lord Tresham*; at St. George's Hall, London, May 2, 1885, and at the Olympic Theatre, March 15, 1888, by the Browning Society; and by the Independent Theatre at the Opera Comique, June 15, 1893. The action takes place during two days.]

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon is the simplest, and perhaps the deepest and finest of Browning's plays. The Browning Society's performances, and Mr. Barrett's in America, have proved its acting capacities, its power to hold and

thrill an audience.[1] The language has a rich simplicity of the highest dramatic value, quick with passion, pregnant with thought and masterly in imagination; the plot and characters are perhaps more interesting and affecting than in any other of the plays; while the effect of the whole is impressive from its unity. The scene is English; the time, somewhere in the eighteenth century; the motive, family honour and dishonour. The story appeals to ready popular emotions, emotions which, though lying nearest the surface, are also the most deeply-rooted. The whole action is passionately pathetic, and it is infused with a twofold tragedy, the tragedy of the sin, and that of the misunderstanding, the last and final tragedy, which hangs on a word, spoken only when too late to save three lives. This irony of circumstance, while it is the source of what is saddest in human discords, is also the motive of what has come to be the only satisfying harmony in dramatic art. It takes the place, in our modern world, of the Necessity of the Greeks; and is not less impressive because it arises from the impulse and unreasoning wilfulness of man rather than from the implacable insistency of God. It is with perfect justice, both moral and artistic, that the fatal crisis, though mediately the result of accident, of error, is shown to be the consequence and the punishment of wrong. A tragedy

[1] A contemporary account, written by Joseph Arnould to Alfred Domett, says: "The first night was magnificent . . . there could be no mistake at all about the honest enthusiasm of the audience. The gallery (and this, of course, was very gratifying, because not to be expected at a play of *Browning*) took all the points quite as quickly as the pit, and entered into the general feeling and interest of the action far more than the boxes. . . Altogether the first night was a triumph.' —*Robert Browning and Alfred Domett*, 1906, p. 65.

resulting from the mistakes of the wholly innocent would jar on our sense of right, and could never produce a legitimate work of art. Even Œdipus suffers, not merely because he is under the curse of a higher power, but because he is wilful, and rushes upon his own fate. Timon suffers, not because he was generous and good, but from the defects of his qualities. So, in this play, each of the characters calls down upon his own head the suffering which at first seems to be a mere caprice and confusion of chance. Mildred Tresham and Henry Mertoun,[1] both very young, ignorant and unguarded, have loved. They attempt a late reparation, apparently with success, but the hasty suspicion of Lord Tresham, Mildred's brother, diverted indeed into a wrong channel, brings down on both a terrible retribution. Tresham, who shares the ruin he causes, feels, too, that his punishment is his due. He has acted without pausing to consider, and he is called on to pay the penalty of "evil wrought by want of thought."

The character of Mildred, a woman "more sinned against than sinning," is exquisitely and tenderly drawn. We see her, and we see and feel

> "The good and tender heart,
> Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
> How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
> How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
> As light where friends are"—

as her brother, in a memorable passage, describes her. She is so thrillingly alive, so beautiful and individual, so pathetic and pitiful in her desolation. Every word she speaks comes straight from her heart to ours. "I know nothing that is so affecting," wrote Dickens

in a letter to Forster, "nothing in any book I have ever read, as Mildred's recurrence to that 'I was so young—I had no mother.' I know no love like it, no passion like it, no moulding of a splendid thing after its conception like it."[1] Not till Pompilia do we find so pathetic a portrait of a woman.

In Thorold, Earl Tresham, we have an admirable picture of the head of a great house, proud above all things of the honour of the family and its yet stainless 'scutcheon, and proud, with a deep brotherly tenderness of his sister Mildred: a strong and fine nature, one whom men instinctively cite as "the perfect spirit of honour." Mertoun, the apparent hero of the play, is a much less prominent and masterly figure than Tresham, not so much from any lack of skill in his delineation, as from the essential ineffectualness of his nature. Guendolen Tresham, the Beatrice of the play (her lover Austin is certainly no Benedick) is one of the most pleasantly humorous characters in Browning. Her gay, light-hearted talk brightens the sombre action like a gleam of sunlight. And like her prototype, she is a true woman. As Beatrice stands by the calumniated Hero, so Guendolen stands by Mildred, and by her quick woman's heart and wit, her instinct of things, sees and seizes the missing clue, though too late, as it proves, to avert the impending disaster.

The play contains one of Browning's most delicate and musical lyrics, the serenade beginning, "There's a woman like a dew-drop." This is the first of the love-songs in long lines which Browning wrote so often at the end of his life, and so seldom earlier.

[1] Forster's *Life of Dickens*, vol. ii., p. 24.

10. Colombe's Birthday: A Play in Five Acts.

[Published in 1844 as No. VI. of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. IV., pp. 71-169). Played at the Haymarket Theatre, April 25, 1853, Miss Helen Faucit taking the part of *Colombe*; also, with Miss Alma Murray as *Colombe*, at St. George's Hall, November 19, 1885, under the direction of the Browning Society. The action takes place from morning to night of one day].

Colombe's Birthday, a drama founded on an imaginary episode in the history of a German duchy of the seventeenth century, is the first play which is mainly concerned with inward rather than outward action; in which the characters themselves, what they are in their own souls, what they think of themselves, and what others think of them, constitute the chief interest, the interest of the characters as they influence one another or external events being secondary. Colombe of Ravestein, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves, is surprised, on the first anniversary of her accession (the day being also her birthday), by a rival claimant to the duchy, Prince Berthold, who proves to be in fact the true heir. Berthold, instead of pressing his claim, offers to marry her. But he conceives the honour and the favour to be sufficient, and makes no pretence at offering love as well. On the other hand, Valence, a poor advocate of Cleves, who has stood by Colombe when all her other friends failed, offers her his love, a love to which she can only respond by "giving up the world"; in other words, by relinquishing her duchy, and the alliance with a Prince who is on the way to be Emperor. We have nothing to do with the question of who has the right and who has the might: that matter

is settled, and the succession agreed on, almost from the beginning. Nor are we made to feel that any disgrace or reputation of weakness will rest on Colombe if she gives up her duchy ; not even that the pang at doing so will be over-acute or entirely unrelieved. All the interest centres in the purely personal and psychological bearings of the act. It is perhaps a consequence of this that the style is somewhat different from that of any previous play. Any one who notices the stage directions will see that the persons of the drama frequently speak "after a pause." The language which they use is, naturally enough, more deliberate and reflective, the lines are slower and more weighty, than would be appropriate amid the breathless action of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* or *The Return of the Druses*. A certain fiery quality, a thrilling, heart-stirred and heart-stirring tone, which we find in these is wanting; but the calm sweep of the action is carried onward by a verse whose large harmonies almost recall *Paracelsus*.

Colombe, the true heroine of the play named after her is, if not "the completest full-length portrait of a woman that Browning has drawn," certainly one of the sweetest and most stable. Her character develops during the course of the play ; as she herself says,

> "This is indeed my birthday—soul and body,
> Its hours have done on me the work of years—"

and it leaves her a nobler and stronger, yet not less charming woman than it found her. Hitherto she has been a mere "play-queen," shut in from action, shut in from facts and the world, and caring only to be gay and amused. But now, at the first and yet final trial, she is

proved and found to be of noble metal. The gay girlishness of the young Duchess, her joyous and generous light heart; her womanliness, her earnestness, her clear, deep, noble nature, attract us from her first words, and leave us, after the hour we have spent in her presence, with a memory like that of some woman whom we have met, for an hour or a moment, in the world or in books.

Berthold, the weary and unsatisfied conqueror, is a singularly unconventional figure. He is a man of action, with some of the sympathies of the scholar and the lover; resolute in the attainment of ends which he sees to be, in themselves, vulgar; his ambition rather an instinct than something to be pursued for itself, and his soul too keenly aware of the joys and interests he foregoes, to be quite satisfied or content with his lot and conduct. The grave courtesy of his speech to Colombe, his somewhat condescending but not unfriendly tone with Valence, his rough home-truths with the parasitical courtiers, and his frank confidence with Melchior, are admirably discriminated. Melchior himself, little as he speaks, is a fine sketch of the contemplative, bookish man who finds no more congenial companion and study than a successful man of action. His attitude of detachment, a mere spectator in the background, is well in keeping with the calm and thoughtful character of the play. Valence, the true hero of the piece, the "pale fiery man" who can speak with so moving an eloquence, whether he is pleading the wrongs of his townsmen or of Colombe, the rights of Berthold or of himself, is no less masterly a portrait than the Prince, though perhaps less wholly unconventional a character. His grave earnestness, his honour as a man

and passion as a lover, move our instinctive sympathy, and he never forfeits it. Were it for nothing else, he would deserve remembrance from the fact that he is one of the speakers in that most delightful of love-duets, the incomparable scene at the close of the fourth act. "I remember well to have seen," wrote Moncure D. Conway in 1854, "a vast miscellaneous crowd in an American theatre hanging with breathless attention upon every word of this interview, down to the splendid climax when, in obedience to the Duchess's direction to Valence how he should reveal his love to the lady she so little suspects herself to be herself, he kneels—every heart evidently feeling each word as an electric touch, and all giving vent at last to their emotion in round after round of hearty applause."

All the minor characters are good and life-like, particularly Guibert, the shrewd, hesitating, talkative, cynical, really good-hearted old courtier, whom not even a court had deprived of a heart, though the dangerous influence of the conscienceless Gaucelme, his fellow, has in its time played sad pranks with it. He is one of the best of Browning's minor characters.

The performance, in 1885, of *Colombe's Birthday*, under the direction of the Browning Society, has brought to light unsuspected acting qualities in what is certainly not the most "dramatic" of Browning's plays. "*Colombe's Birthday*," it was said on the occasion, "is charming on the boards, clearer, more direct in action, more full of delicate surprises than one imagines it in print. With a very little cutting it could be made an excellent acting play." [1]

[1] A. Mary F. Robinson, in *Boston Literary World*, December 12, 1885.

11. Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.

[Published in 1845 as No. VII. of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, dispersedly, in Vols. IV., V., and VI.).]

Dramatic Romances, Browning's second volume of miscellaneous poems, is not markedly different in style or substance from the *Lyrics* published three years earlier. It is somewhat more mature, no doubt, as a whole, somewhat richer and fuller, somewhat wider in reach and firmer in grasp; but in tone and treatment it harmonises considerably more with its predecessor than with its successor, after so long an interval, *Men and Women*. The book opens with the ballad, *How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, the most popular piece, except perhaps the *Pied Piper*, that Browning has written. Few boys, I suppose, have not read with breathless emotion this most stirring of ballads: few men can read it without a thrill. The "good news" is intended for that of the Pacification of Ghent, but the incident itself is not historical. The poem was written at sea, off the African coast. Another poem of somewhat similar kind, appealing more directly than usual to the simpler feelings, is *The Lost Leader*. It was written in reference to Wordsworth's abandonment of the Liberal cause, with perhaps a thought of Southey, but it is applicable to any popular apostasy. This is one of those songs that do the work of swords. It shows how easily Browning, had he so chosen, could have stirred the national feeling with his songs. The *Home-Thoughts from Abroad* belongs, in its simple directness, its personal and forthright fervour of song, to this section of

the volume. With the two pieces now known as *Home-Thoughts from Abroad* and *Home-Thoughts from the Sea*, a third, very inferior, piece was originally published. It is now more appropriately included with *Claret* and *Tokay* (two capital little snatches) under the head of *Nationality in Drinks*. The two "Home-Thoughts," from sea and from land, are equally remarkable for their poetry and for their patriotism. I hope there is no need to commend to all Englishmen so passionate and heart-felt a record of love for England. It is in *Home-Thoughts from Abroad*, that we find the well-known and magical lines on the thrush :—

> "That's the wise thrush : he sings each song twice over,
> Lest you should think he never could recapture
> The first fine careless rapture ! "

The whole poem is beautiful, but *Home-Thoughts from the Sea* is of that order of song that moves the heart "more than with a trumpet."

> "Nobly, nobly, Cape Saint Vincent to the North-West died away ;
> Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay ;
> Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay ;
> In the dimmest North-East distance dawned Gibraltar grand and gray ;
> 'Here and here did England help me : how can I help England ?'—say,
> Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
> While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa."

Next to *The Lost Leader* comes, in the original edition, a sort of companion poem, in

"THE LOST MISTRESS.

I.

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
  As one at first believes?
Hark! 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
  About your cottage eaves!

II.

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
  I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully
  —You know the red turns gray.

III.

To-morrow we meet the same, then, dearest?
  May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we,—well, friends the merest
  Keep much that I resign:

IV.

For each glance of the eye so bright and black
  Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
  Though it stay in my heart for ever!—

V.

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
  Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
  Or so very little longer!"

This is one of those love-songs which we cannot but consider among the noblest of such songs in all Love's language. The subject of "unrequited love" has probably produced more effusions of sickly sentiment than any other single subject. But Browning, who has

employed the motive so often (here, for instance, and yet more notably in *The Last Ride Together*) deals with it in a way that is at once novel and fundamental. There is no talk, among his lovers, of "blighted hearts," no whining and puling, no contemptible professions of contempt for the woman who has had the ill-taste to refuse some wondrous-conceited lover, but a noble manly resignation, a profound and still grateful sorrow which has no touch in it of reproach, no tone of disloyalty, and no pretence of despair. In the first of the *Garden Fancies* (*The Flower's Name*), a delicate little love-story of a happier kind is hinted at. The second *Garden Fancy* (*Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*) is of very different tone. It is a whimsical tale of a no less whimsical revenge taken upon a piece of pedantic lumber, the name of which is given in the title. The varying ring and swing communicated to the dactyls of these two pieces by the jolly humour of the one and the refined sentiment of the other, is a point worth noticing. The easy flow, the careless charm of their versification, is by no means the artless matter it may seem to a careless reader. Nor is it the easiest of metrical tasks to poise perfectly the loose lilt of such verses as these:—

"What a name! Was it love or praise?
 Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?
I must learn Spanish, one of these days,
 Only for that slow sweet name's sake."

The two perfect little pieces on "Fame" and "Love," *Earth's Immortalities*, are remarkable, even in Browning's work, for their concentrated felicity, and, the second especially, for swift suggestiveness of haunting music.

Not less exquisite in its fresh melody and subtle simplicity is the following *Song* :—

I.

" Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress ?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her ?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall ?

II.

Because, you spend your lives in praising ;
To praise, you search the wide world over :
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her ?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much ! "

In two tiny pictures, *Night and Morning*, one of four lines, the other of twelve, we have, besides the picture, two moments which sum up a lifetime, and " on how fine a needle's point that little world of passion is balanced ! "

I.

" Meeting at Night.

1.

The gray sea and the long black land ;
And the yellow half-moon large and low ;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

2.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach ;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears ;

A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

II.

PARTING AT MORNING.

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me."

But the largest, if not the greatest work in the volume must be sought for, not in the romances, properly speaking, nor in the lyrics, but in the dramatic monologues. *Pictor Ignotus* (Florence, 15—) is the first of those poems about painting, into which Browning has put so much of his finest art. It is a sort of first faint hint or foreshadowing of *Andrea del Sarto*, perfectly individual and distinct though it is. *Pictor Ignotus* expresses the subdued sadness of a too timid or too sensitive nature, an "unknown painter" who has dreamed of painting great pictures and winning great fame, but who shrinks equally from the attempt and the reward: an attempt which he is too self-distrustful to make, a reward which he is too painfully discriminating to enjoy.

"So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?"

The monotonous "linked sweetness long drawn out" of the verses, the admirably arranged pause, recurrence and relapse of the lines, render the sense and substance of

the subject with singular appropriateness. *The Tomb at St. Praxed's* (now known as *The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church*), has been finally praised by Ruskin, and the whole passage may be here quoted :—

"Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages ; always vital, right, and profound ; so that in the matter of art, with which we have been specially concerned, there is hardly a principle connected with the mediæval temper that he has not struck upon in those seemingly careless and too rugged lines of his.

"'As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead ?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace ;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know :
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care ;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same !
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats.
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk :
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands :
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him ! True peach,
Rosy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
Draw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were missed !
My sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig

The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I ! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast. . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati-villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst !
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath ?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine,
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at !
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas !
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ?

—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need.'

I know no other piece of modern English prose or poetry in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I have said of the central Renaissance in thirty pages of the *Stones of Venice*, put into as many lines, Browning's also being the antecedent work."[1]

This poem is the third of the iambic monologues, and, but for *Artemis Prologizes*, the first in blank verse. I am not aware if it was written much later than *Pictor Ignotus*, but it belongs to a later manner. Scarcely at his very best, scarcely in the very greatest monologues of the central series of *Men and Women*, or in these only, has Browning written a finer or a more characteristic poem. As a study in human nature it has all the concentrated truth, all the biting and imaginative realism, of a scene from Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*: it is as much a fact and a creation. It is, moreover, as Ruskin has told us, typical not only of a single individual but of a whole epoch; while, as a piece of metrical writing, it has all the originality of an innovation. If Browning can scarcely be said to have created this species of blank verse, half familiar, vivid with natural life, full of vigour and beauty, rising and falling, with the unerring motion of the sea, he has certainly adapted, perfected, and made it a new thing in his hands.

Akin to *The Tomb at St. Praxed's* on its dramatic, though dissimilar on its lyric, side, is the picturesque and

[1] *Modern Painters*, Vol. IV., pp. 377-79.

terrible little poem of *The Laboratory*,[1] in which a Brinvilliers of the *Ancien Régime* is represented buying poison for her rival; one of the very finest examples of Browning's unique power of compressing and concentrating intense emotion into a few pregnant words, each of which has its own visible gesture and audible intonation.

It is in such poems that Browning is at his best, nor is he perhaps anywhere so inimitable. The second poem under the general heading of "France and Spain," *The Confessional*, in which a girl, half-maddened by remorse and impotent rage, tells how a false priest induced her to betray the political secrets of her lover, is, though vivid and effective, not nearly so powerful and penetrating as its companion piece. *Time's Revenges* may perhaps be classified with these utterances of individual passion, though in form it is more closely connected with the poems I shall touch on next. It is a bitter and affecting little poem, not unlike some of the poems written many years afterwards by a remarkable and unfortunate poet,[2] who knew, in his own experience, something of what Browning happily rendered by the instinct of the dramatist only. It is a powerful and literal rendering of a certain sordid and tragic aspect of life, and is infused with that peculiar grim humour, the laugh that chokes in a sob, which comes to men when mere lamentation is a thing foregone.

The octosyllabic couplets of *Time's Revenges*, as well as its similarly realistic treatment and striking simplicity

[1] It is interesting to remember that Rossetti's first water-colour was an illustration of this poem, and has for subject and title the line, "Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?"

[2] James Thomson, the writer of *The City of Dreadful Night*.

of verse and phrase, connect it with the admirable little poem now know as *The Italian in England.*[1] This is a tale of an Italian patriot, who, after an unsuccessful rising, has taken refuge in England. It tells of his escape and of how he was saved from the Austrian pursuers by the tact and fidelity of a young peasant woman. Its chief charm lies in the simplicity and sincere directness of its telling. *The Englishman in Italy*, a poem of very different class, written in brisk and vigorous anapæsts, is a .ivid and humorous picture of Italian country life. It is delightfully gay and charming and picturesque, and is the most entirely descriptive poem ever written by Browning. In *The Glove* we have a new version, from an original and characteristic standpoint, of the familiar old story known to all in its metrical version by Leigh Hunt, and more curtly rhymed (without any very great impressiveness) by Schiller. Browning has shown elsewhere that he can tell a simple anecdote simply, but he has here seized upon the tale of the glove, not for the purpose of telling over again what Leigh Hunt had so charmingly and sufficiently told, but in order to present the old story in a new light, to show how the lady might have been right and the knight wrong, in spite of King Francis's verdict and the look of things. The tale, which is very wittily told, and contains some fine serious lines on the lion, is supposed to be related by Peter Ronsard, in the position of onlooker and moraliser; and the character of the narrator, after the poet's manner, is brought out by many cunning

[1] "Mr Browning is proud to remember," we are told by Mrs Orr, "that Mazzini informed him he had read this poem to certain of his fellow exiles in England to show how an Englishman could sympathise with them."—*Handbook*, 2nd ed., p. 306.

little touches. The poem is written almost throughout in double rhymes, in the metre and much in the manner of the *Pacchiarotto* of thirty years later. It is worth noticing that in the lines spoken by the lady to Ronsard, and in these alone, the double rhymes are replaced by single ones, thus making a distinct severance between the earnestness of this one passage and the cynical wit of the rest.

The easy mastery of difficult rhyming which we notice in this piece is still more marked in the strange and beautiful romance named *The Flight of the Duchess*.[1] Not even in *Pacchiarotto* has Browning so revelled in the most outlandish and seemingly incredible combinations of sound, double and treble rhymes of equal audacity and success. There is much dramatic appropriatenesss in the unconventional diction, the story being put into the mouth of a rough old huntsman. The device of linking fantasy with familiarity is very curious, and the effect is original in the extreme. The poem is a fusion of many elements, and has all the varying colour of a romantic comedy. Contrast the intensely picturesque opening landscape, the cleverly minute description of the gipsies

[1] Some curious particulars are recorded in reference to the composition of this poem. "*The Flight of the Duchess* took its rise from a line—'Following the Queen of the Gipsies, O!' the burden of a song which the poet, when a boy, heard a woman singing on a Guy Fawkes' day. The poem was written in two parts, of which the first was published in *Hood's Magazine*, April, 1845, and contained only nine sections. As Mr Browning was writing it, he was interrupted by the arrival of a friend on some important business, which drove all thoughts of the Duchess and the scheme of her story out of the poet's head. But some months after the publication of the first part, when he was staying at Bettisfield Park, in Shropshire, a guest, speaking of early winter, said, 'The deer had already to break the ice in the pond.' On this a fancy struck the poet, and, on returning home, he worked it up into the conclusion of *The Flight of the Duchess* as it now stands."—*Academy*, May 5, 1883.

and their trades, the humorous naturalness of the Duke's mediæval masquerading as related by his unsympathising forester, and, in a higher key the beautiful figure of the young Duchess, and the serene, mystical splendour of the old gipsy's chant.

Two poems yet remain to be named, and two of the most perfect in the book. The little parable poem of *The Boy and the Angel* is one of the most simply beautiful, yet deeply earnest, of Browning's lyrical poems. It is a parable in which "the allegorical intent seems to be shed by the story, like a natural perfume from a flower;" and it preaches a sermon on contentment and the doing of God's will such as no theologian could better. *Saul* (which I shall mention here, though only the first part, sections one to nine, appeared in *Dramatic Romances*, sections ten to nineteen being first published in *Men and Women*) has been by some considered almost or quite Browning's finest poem. And indeed it seems to unite almost the whole of his qualities as a poet in perfect fusion. Music, song, the beauty of nature, the joy of life, the glory and greatness of man, the might of Love, human and divine: all these are set to an orchestral accompaniment of continuous harmony, now hushed as the wind among the woods at evening, now strong and sonorous as the storm-wind battling with the mountain-pine. *Saul* is a vision of life, of time and of eternity, told in song as sublime as the vision is steadfast. The choral symphony of earth and all her voices with which the poem concludes is at once the easiest passage to separate from its context, and (if we may dare, in such a matter, to choose) one, at least, of the very greatest of all.

"I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth—
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still
Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—'E'en so, it is so!'"

12. A Soul's Tragedy.

[Published in 1846 (with *Luria*) as No. VIII. of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. IV., pp. 257-302). Acted by the Stage Society at the Court Theatre, March 13, 1904.]

The development of Browning's genius, as shown in his plays, has been touched on in dealing with *Colombe's Birthday*. That play, as I intimated, shows the first token of transition from the comparatively conventional dramatic style of the early plays to the completely unconventional style of the later ones, which in turn lead almost imperceptibly to the final pausing-place of the monologue. From *A Blot in the 'Scrutcheon* to *Colombe's Birthday* is a step; from *Colombe's Birthday* to *A Soul's Tragedy* and *Luria* another step; and in these last we are not more than another step from *Men and Women* and its successors. In *A Soul's Tragedy* the action is all internalized. Outward action there is, and of a sufficiently picturesque nature; but here, considerably more than even in *Colombe's Birthday*, the interest is withdrawn from the action, as action, and concentrated on a single character, whose "soul's tragedy," not his mere worldly fortunes, strange and significant as these are, we are called on to contemplate. Chiappino fills and possesses the scene. The other characters are carefully subordinated, and the impression we receive is not unlike that received from one of Browning's most vivid and complete monologues, with its carefully placed apparatus of side-lights.

The character of Chiappino is that of a Djabal degenerated; he is the second of Browning's delineations

of the half-deceived and half-deceiving nature, the moral hybrid. Chiappino comes before us as a much-professing yet apparently little-performing person, moody and complaining, envious of his friend Luitolfo's better fortune, a soured man and a discontented patriot. But he is quite sure of his own complete probity. He declaims bitterly against his fellow-townsmen, his friend, and the woman whom he loves; all of whom, he asseverates, treat him unjustly, and as he never could, by any possibility, treat them. While he is thus protesting to Eulalia, his friend's betrothed, to whom for the first time he avows his own love, a trial is at hand, and nearer than he or we expect. Luitolfo rushes in. He has gone to the Provost's palace to intercede on behalf of his banished friend, and in a moment of wrath has struck and, as he thinks, killed the Provost: the guards are after him, and he is lost. Is this the moment of test? Apparently; and apparently Chiappino proves his nobility. For, with truly heroic unselfishness, he exchanges dress with his friend, induces him, in a sort of stupefaction of terror, to escape, and remains in his place, "to die for him." But the harder test has yet to come. Instead of the Provost's guards, it is the enthusiastic populace that bursts in upon him, hailing him as saviour and liberator. The people have risen in revolt, the guards have fled, and the people call on the striker of the blow to be their leader. Chiappino says nothing. "Chiappino?" says Eulalia, questioning him with her eyes. "Yes, I understand," he rejoins,

> "You think I should have promptlier disowned
> This deed with its strange unforeseen success,
> In favour of Luitolfo. But the peril,
> So far from ended, hardly seems begun.

To-morrow, rather, when a calm succeeds,
We easily shall make him full amends:
And meantime—if we save them as they pray,
And justify the deed by its effects?
Eu. You would, for worlds, you had denied at once.
Ch. I know my own intention, be assured!
All's well. Precede us, fellow-citizens!"

Thus ends act first, "being what was called the poetry of Chiappino's life;" and act second, "its prose," opens after a supposed interval of a month.

The second act exhibits, in very humorous prose, the gradual and inevitable deterioration which the silence and the deception have brought about. Drawn on and on, upon his own lines of thought and conduct, by Ogniben, the Pope's legate, who has come to put down the revolt by diplomatic measures, Chiappino denies his political principles, finding a democratic rule not at all so necessary when the provostship may perhaps fall to himself; denies his love, for his views of love are, he finds, widened; and finally, denies his friend, to the extent of arguing that the very blow which, as struck by Luitolfo, has been the factor of his fortune, was practically, because logically, his own. Ogniben now agrees to invest him with the Provost's office, making at the same time the stipulation that the actual assailant of the Provost shall suffer the proper penalty. Hereupon Luitolfo comes forward and avows the deed. Ogniben orders him to his house; Chiappino "goes aside for a time;" "and now," concludes the legate, addressing the people, "give thanks to God, the keys of the Provost's palace to me, and yourselves to profitable meditation at home."

Besides Chiappino, there are three other characters,

who serve to set off the main figure. Eulalia is an observer, Luitolfo a foil, Ogniben a touchstone. Eulalia and Luitolfo, though sufficiently worked out for their several purposes, are only sketches, the latter perhaps more distinctly outlined than the former, and serving admirably as a contrast to Chiappino. But Ogniben, who does so much of the talking in the second act, is a really memorable figure. His portrait is painted with more prominent effect, for his part in the play is to draw Chiappino out, and to confound him with his own weapons: "I help men," as he says, "to carry out their own principles; if they please to say two and two make five, I assent, so they will but go on and say, four and four make ten." His shrewd Socratic prose is delightfully wise and witty. This prose, the only dramatic prose written by Browning, with the exception of that in *Pippa Passes*, is, in its way, almost as good as the poetry: keen, vivacious, full-thoughted, picturesque, and singularly original. For instance, Chiappino is expressing his longing for a woman who could understand, as he says, the whole of him, to whom he could reveal alike his strength and weakness.

"Ah, my friend," rejoins Ogniben, "wish for nothing so foolish! Worship your love, give her the best of you to see; be to her like the western lands (they bring us such strange news of) to the Spanish Court; send her only your lumps of gold, fans of feathers, your spirit-like birds, and fruits and gems. So shall you, what is unseen of you, be supposed altogether a paradise by her,—as these western lands by Spain: though I warrant there is filth, red baboons, ugly reptiles and squalor enough, which they bring Spain as few samples of as possible."

There is in all this prose, lengthy as it is, the true

dramatic note, a recognisable tone of talk. But *A Soul's Tragedy* is for the study, not the stage.

13. LURIA: A Tragedy in Five Acts.

[Published in 1846 (with *A Soul's Tragedy*) as No. VIII of *Bells and Pomegranates* (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. VI. pp. 205-289). The action takes place from morning to night of one day].

The action and interest in *Luria* are somewhat less internalised than in *A Soul's Tragedy*, but the drama is in form a still nearer approach to monologue. Many of the speeches are so long as to be almost monologues in themselves; and the whole play is manifestly written (unlike the other plays, except its immediate predecessor, or rather its contemporary) with no thought of the stage. The poet is retreating farther and farther from the glare of the footlights; he is writing after his own fancy, and not as his audience or his manager would wish him to write. None of Browning's plays is so full of large heroic speech, of deep philosophy, of choice illustration; seldom has he written nobler poetry. There is not the intense and throbbing humanity of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon;* the characters are not so simply and so surely living men and women; but in the grave and lofty speech and idealised characters of *Luria* we have something new, and something great as well.

The central figure is Luria himself; but the other characters are not so carefully and completely subordinated to him as are those in *A Soul's Tragedy* to Chiappino. Luria is one of the noblest and most heroic figures in Browning's works. A Moor, with the instincts of the East and the culture of the West, he presents a racial

problem which is very subtly handled ; while his natural nobility and confidence are no less subtly set off against the Italian craft of his surroundings. The spectacle he presents is impressive and pathetic. An alien, with no bond to Florence save that of his inalienable love, he has led her forces against the Pisans, and saved her. Looking for no reward but the grateful love of the people he has saved, he meets instead with the basest ingratitude. While he is fighting and conquering for her, Florence, at home, is trying him for his life on a charge of treachery : a charge which has no foundation but in the base natures of his accusers, who know that he might, and therefore suspect that he will, turn to evil purpose his military successes and the power which they have gained him over the army. Generals of their own blood have betrayed them : how much more will this barbarian? Luria learns of the treachery of his allies in time to take revenge, he is urged to take revenge, and the means are placed in his hands, but his nobler nature conquers, and the punishment he deals on Florence is the punishment of his own voluntary death. The strength of love which restrains him from punishing the ungrateful city forbids him to live when his only love has proved false, his only link to life has gone. But before he dies he has the satisfaction of seeing the late repentance and regret of every enemy, whether secret schemer or open foe.

> "Luria goes not poorly forth.
> If we could wait ! The only fault's with time ;
> All men become good creatures : but so slow ! "

In the pathos of his life and death Luria may remind us of another unrequited lover, Strafford, whose devotion to

his king gains the same reward as Luria's devotion to his adopted country.

In Luria's faithful friend and comrade Husain we have a contrasted picture of the Moor untouched by alien culture. The instincts of the one are dulled or disturbed by his Western wisdom and experience; Husain still keeps the old instincts and the unmixed nature, and still speaks the fervid and highly-coloured Eastern speech. But while Husain is to some extent a contrast with Luria, Luria and Husain together form an infinitely stronger contrast with the group of Italians. Braccio, the Florentine Commissary, is an admirable study of Italian subtlety and craft. Only a writer with Browning's special knowledge and sympathies could have conceived and executed so acute and true a picture of the Italian temper of the time, a temper manifested with singular appropriateness by the city of Machiavelli. Braccio is the chief schemer against Luria, and he schemes, not from any real ill-will, but from the diplomatic distrust of a too cautious and too suspicious patriot. Domizia, the vengeful Florentine lady, plotting against Florence with the tireless patience of an unforgetting wrong, is also a representative sketch, though not so clearly and firmly outlined as a character. Puccio, Luria's chief officer, once his commander, the simple fighting soldier, discontented but honest, unswervingly loyal to Florence, but little by little aware of and aggrieved at the wrong done to Luria, is a really touching conception. Tiburzio, the Pisan leader, is yet finer in his perfect chivalry of service to his foe. Nothing could be more nobly planned than the first meeting, and indeed the whole relations, of these magnanimous and

worthy opponents, Luria and Tiburzio. There is a certain intellectual fascination for Browning in the analysis of mean natures and dubious motives, but of no contemporary can it be more justly said that he rises always and easily to the height and at the touch of an heroic action or of a noble nature.

14. Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day: A Poem.

[Published in 1850 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. V., pp. 207-307). Written in Florence.]

Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day is the chief work in which Browning deals directly and primarily with the subject of Christianity and the religious beliefs of the age. Both the poems which appear under this title are studies of religious life and thought, the first more in the narrative and critical way, the second rather in relation to individual experience. Browning's position towards Christianity is perhaps unique. He has been described as "the latest extant Defender of the Faith," but the manner of his belief and the modes of his defence are as little conventional as any other of his qualities. Beyond all question the most deeply religious poet of our day, perhaps the greatest religious poet we have ever had, Browning has never written anything in the ordinary style of religious verse, the style of Herbert, of Keble, of the hymn-writers. The spirit which runs through all his work is more often felt as an influence than manifested in any concrete and separate form. *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*, *La Saisiaz* and *Ferishtah's Fancies* are the only prominent exceptions to this rule.

Christmas-Eve is a study or vision of the religious life

of the time. It professes to be the narrative of a strange experience lived through on a Christmas-Eve ("whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body,") in a little dissenting chapel on the outskirts of a country town, in St. Peter's at Rome, and at an agnostic lecture-hall in Göttingen. The vivid humorous sketch of the little chapel and its flock is like a bit of Dickens at his best. Equally good, in another kind, is the picture of the Professor and his audience at Göttingen, with its searching and scathing irony of merciless logic, and the tender and subtle discrimination of its judgment, sympathetic with the good faith of the honest thinker. Different again in style, and higher still in poetry, is the glowing description of the Basilica and its sensuous fervour of ceremonial; and higher and greater yet the picture of the double lunar rainbow merging into that of the vision: a piece of imaginative work never perhaps exceeded in spiritual exaltation and concordant splendour of song in the whole work of the poet, though equalled, if not exceeded, by the more terrible vision of judgment which will be cited later from *Easter-Day*.

"For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.

It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of purest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge.
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?"

At moments of such energy and ecstasy as this, all that there is in the poet of mere worldly wisdom and intellectual ingenuity drops off, or rather is consumed to a white glow in the intense flame of triumphant and overmastering inspiration.

The piercing light cast in the poem on the representative creeds of the age is well worthy of serious consideration, from an ethical as well as from a poetical point of view. No nobler lesson of religious tolerance, united with religious earnestness, has been preached in our day. Nothing could be more novel and audacious than the union here attempted and achieved of colloquial realism and grotesque humour with imaginative vision and solemn earnestness. The style and metre vary with the mood. Where the narrative is serious the lines are regular and careful, they shrink to their smallest structural limit, and the rhymes are chiefly single and simple. Where it becomes humorous, the rhythm lengthens out its elastic

syllables to the full extent, and swings and sways, jolts and rushes; the rhymes fall double and triple and break out into audible laughter.

Easter-Day, like its predecessor, is written in lines of four beats each, but the general effect is totally dissimilar. Here the verse is reduced to its barest constituents; every line is, syllabically as well as accentually, of equal length; and the lines run in pairs, without one double rhyme throughout. The tone and contents of the two poems (though also, in a sense, derived from the same elements) are in singular contrast. *Easter-Day*, despite a momentary touch or glimmer, here and there, of grave humour, is thoroughly serious in manner and continuously solemn in subject. The burden of the poem is stated in its first two lines:—

> "How very hard it is to be
> A Christian!"

Up to the thirteenth section it is an argument between the speaker, who is possessed of much faith but has a distinct tendency to pessimism, and another, who has a sceptical but also a hopeful turn of mind, respecting Christianity, its credibility, and how its doctrines fit human nature and affect the conduct of life. After keen discussion the argument returns to the lament, common to both disputants: how very hard it is to be, practically, a Christian. The speaker then relates, on account of its bearing on the discussion, an experience (or vision, as he leaves us free to imagine) which once came to him. Three years before, on an Easter-Eve, he was crossing the common where stood the chapel referred to by their friend (the poem thus, and thus only, links on to

Christmas-Eve). As he walked along, musingly, he asked himself what the Faith really was to him; what would be his fate, for instance, if he fell dead that moment? And he said to himself, jestingly enough, why should not the judgment-day dawn now, on Easter-morn?

"And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
Burn it!' And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable,—
Just so great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out its surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed

No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side,
Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world."

Judgment, according to the vision, is now over. He who has chosen earth rather than heaven, is allowed his choice: earth is his for ever. How the walls of the world shrink and narrow, how the glow fades off from the beauty of nature, of art, of science; how the judged soul prays for only a chance of love, only a hope of ultimate heaven; how the ban is taken off him, and he wakes from the vision on the grey plain as Easter-morn is breaking: this, with its profound and convincing moral lessons, is told, without a didactic note, in poetry of sustained splendour. In sheer height of imagination *Easter-Day* could scarcely exceed the greatest parts of *Christmas-Eve*, but it preserves a level of more equable splendour, it is a work of art of more chastened workmanship. In its ethical aspect it is also of special importance, for, while the poet does not necessarily identify himself in all respects with the seer of the vision, the poem enshrines some of Browning's deepest convictions on life and religion.

15. Men and Women.

[Published in 1855, in 2 vols.; now dispersed in Vols. IV., V. and VI. of *Poetical Works*, 1889.]

The series of *Men and Women*, fifty-one poems in number, represents Browning's genius at its ripe maturity, its highest uniform level. In this central work of his career, every element of his genius is equally developed, and the whole brought into a perfection of harmony never before or since attained. There is no lack, there is no excess. I do not say that the poet has not touched higher heights since, or perhaps before; but that he has never since nor before maintained himself so long on so high a height, never exhibited the rounded perfection, the imagination, thought, passion, melody, variety, all fused in one, never produced a single work or group at once so great and so various, admits, I think, of little doubt. Here are fifty poems, every one of which, in its way, is a masterpiece; and the range is such as no other English poet has perhaps ever covered in a single book of miscellaneous poems.

In *Men and Women* Browning's special instrument, the monologue, is brought to perfection. Such monologues as *Andrea del Sarto* or the *Epistle of Karshish* never have been, and probably never will be surpassed, on their own ground, after their own order. To conceive a drama, to present every side and phase and feature of it from one point of view, to condense all its potentialities of action, all its significance and import, into some few hundred lines, this has been done by but one poet, and nowhere with such absolute perfection as here. Even when dealing with a single emotion, Browning usually

crystallizes it into a choice situation ; and almost every poem in the series, down to the smallest lyric, is essentially a dramatic monologue. But perhaps the most striking instances of the form and method, and, with the little drama of *In a Balcony*, the principal poems in the collection, are the five blank verse pieces, *Andrea del Sarto*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Cleon*, *Karshish*, and *Bishop Blougram*. Each is a masterpiece of poetry. Each is in itself a drama, and contains the essence of a life, condensed into a single episode, or indicated in a combination of discourse, conversation, argument, soliloquy, reminiscence. Each, besides being the presentation of a character, moves in a certain atmosphere of its own, philosophical, ethical, or artistic. *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* deal with art. *Cleon* and *Karshish*, in a sense companion poems, are concerned, each secondarily, with the arts and physical sciences, primarily with the attitude of the Western and Eastern worlds when confronted with the problem of the Gospel of Christ. *Bishop Blougram* is modern, ecclesiastical and argumentative. But however different in form and spirit, however diverse in *milieu*, each is alike the record of a typical soul at a typical moment.

Andrea del Sarto is a "translation into song" of the picture known as "Andrea del Sarto and his Wife," in the Pitti Palace at Florence. The story of Andrea del Sarto is told by Vasari, in one of the best known of his *Lives:* how the painter, who at one time seemed as if he might have competed with Raphael, was ruined, as artist and as man, by his beautiful, soulless wife, the fatal Lucrezia del Fede ; and how, led and lured by her, he outraged his conscience, lowered his ideal, and, losing all

heart and hope, sank into the cold correctness, the unerring fluency, the uniform, melancholy repetition of a single type, his wife's, which distinguish his later works. Browning has taken his facts from Vasari, and he has taken them quite literally. But what a change, what a transformation and transfiguration! Instead of a piece of prose biography and criticism, we have (in Mr. Swinburne's appropriate words) "the whole man raised up and reclothed with flesh." No more absolutely creative work has been done in our days; few more beautiful and pathetic poems written. The mood of sad, wistful, hopeless mournfulness of resignation which the poem expresses, is a somewhat rare one with Browning's vivid and vivacious genius. It is an autumn twilight piece.

> "A common greyness silvers everything,—
> All in a twilight, you and I alike
> —You, at the point of your first pride in me
> (That's gone, you know),—but I, at every point;
> My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
> To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
> There's the bell clinking from the chapel top;
> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
> And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
> Eh, the whole seems to fall into a shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all that I was born to be and do,
> A twilight-piece."

The very movement of the lines, their tone and touch, contribute to the effect. A single clear impression is made to result from an infinity of minute, scarcely appreciable touches: how fine these touches are, how

clear the impression, can only be hinted at in words, can be realised only by a loving and scrupulous study.

Whether the picture which suggested the poem is an authentic work of Andrea, or whether, as experts have now agreed, it is a work by an unknown artist representing an imaginary man and woman is, of course, of no possible consequence in connection with the poem. Nor is it of any more importance that the Andrea of Vasari is in all probability not the real Andrea. Historic fact has nothing to do with poetry: it is mere material, the quarry of ideas; and the real truth of Browning's portrait of Andrea would no more be impugned by the establishment of Vasari's inaccuracy, than the real truth of Shakespeare's portrait of Macbeth by the proof of the untrustworthiness of Holinshed.

A greater contrast, in every respect, than that between *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* can scarcely be conceived. The story of Filippo Lippi[1] is taken, like that of Andrea, from Vasari's *Lives:* it is taken as literally, it is made as authentically living, and, in its own more difficult way, it is no less genuine a poem. The jolly, jovial tone of the poem, its hearty humour and high spirits, and the breathless rush and hurry of the verse, render the scapegrace painter to the life. Not less in keeping is the situation in which the unsaintly friar is introduced: caught by the civic guard, past midnight, in an equivocal neighbourhood, quite able and ready, however, to fraternise with his captors, and pour forth, rough and ready, his ideas and adventures. A passage

[1] The picture which Lippo promises to paint (ll. 347-389) is an exact description of his *Coronation of the Virgin*, in the Accademia delle Belle Arti at Florence.

from the poem placed side by side with an extract from Vasari will show how faithfully the record of Fra Lippo's life is followed, and it will also show, in some small measure, the essential newness, the vividness and revelation of the poet's version.

"By the death of his father," writes Vasari,[1] "he was left a friendless orphan at the age of two years, his mother also having died shortly after his birth. The child was for some time under the care of a certain Mona Lapaccia, his aunt, the sister of his father, who brought him up with great difficulty until he had attained his eighth year, when, being no longer able to support the burden of his maintenance, she placed him in the above-named convent of the Carmelites."

Here is Browning's version :—

"I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month :
'So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
'To quit this very miserable world?'"

But not only has Browning given a wonderfully realistic portrait of the man; a man to whom life in its fulness was the only joy, a true type of the Renaissance spirit, metamorphosed by ironic fate into a monk; he

[1] Mrs Foster's translation (Bohn).

has luminously indicated the true end and aim of art and the false asceticism of so-called "religious" art, in the characteristic comments and confessions of an innovator in the traditions of religious painting.

Cleon is prefaced by the text "As certain also of your own poets have said" (*Acts*, xvii. 28), and is supposed to be a letter from one of the poets to whom St. Paul refers, addressed to Protus, an imaginary "Tyrant," whose wondering admiration of Cleon's many-sided culture has drawn him to one who is at once poet, painter, sculptor, musician and philosopher. Compared with such poems as *Andrea del Sarto*, there is little realisable detail in the course of the calm argument or statement, but I scarcely see how the temper of the time, among its choicest spirits (the time of classic decadence, of barren culture, of fruitless philosophy) could well have been more finely shadowed forth. The quality of the versification, unique here as in every one of the five great poems, is perfectly adapted to the subject. The slow sweep of the verse, its stately melody, its large, clear, classic harmony, enable us to receive the right impression as admirably as the other qualities, already pointed out, enable us to feel the resigned sadness of Andrea and the jovial gusto of Lippo. In *Cleon* we have a historical picture, imaginary indeed, but typical. It reveals or records the religious feeling of the pagan world at the time of the coming of Christ; its sadness, dissatisfaction and expectancy, and the failure of its wisdom to fathom the truths of the new Gospel.

In *An Epistle containing the strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician*, we have perhaps a yet more subtle delineation of a character similar by contrast. Cleon is a type of the Western and sceptical, Karshish

of the Eastern and believing, attitude of mind; the one repellent, the other absorbent, of new things offered for belief. Karshish, "the picker up of learning's crumbs," writes from Syria to his master at home, "Abib, all sagacious in our art," concerning a man whose singular case has fascinated him, one Lazarus of Bethany. There are few more lifelike and subtly natural narratives in Browning's poetry; few more absolutely interpenetrated by the finest imaginative sympathy. The scientific caution and technicality of the Arab physician, his careful attempt at a statement of the case from a purely medical point of view, his self-reproachful uneasiness at the strange interest which the man's story has caused in him, the strange credulity which he cannot keep from encroaching on his mind: all this is rendered with a matchless delicacy and accuracy of touch and interpretation. Nor can anything be finer than the representation of Lazarus after his resurrection, a representation which has significance beyond its literal sense, and points a moral often enforced by the poet: that doubt and mystery, in life and in religion alike, are necessary, and indeed alone make either life or religion possible. The special point in the tale of Lazarus which has impressed Karshish with so intense an interest is that

> "This man so cured regards the curer, then,
> As—God forgive me! who but God himself,
> Creator and sustainer of the world,
> That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
> —'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
> Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
> Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
> And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
> And must have so avouched himself, in fact,

In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!"

How perfectly the attitude of the Arab sage is here given, drawn, against himself, to a conviction which he feels ashamed to entertain. As in *Cleon* the very pith of the letter is contained in the postscript, so, after the apologies and farewell greetings of Karshish, the thought which all the time has been burning within him bursts into flame.

"The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!'
The madman saith He said so: it is strange."

So far, the monologues are single-minded, and represent the sincere and frank expression of the thoughts and opinions of their speakers. *Bishop Blougram's Apology* introduces a new element, the casuistical. The Bishop's Apology is, literally, an *apologia*, a speech in defence of himself, in which the aim is to confound an adversary, not to state the truth. This form, intellectual rather than emotional, argumentative more than dramatic, has had, from this time forward, a considerable attraction for Browning, and it is responsible for some of his hardest work, such as *Fifine at the Fair* and *Prince Hohenstiel-*

Schwangau. *Bishop Blougram's Apology* represents the after-dinner talk of a great Roman Catholic dignitary. It is addressed to Mr. Gigadibs, a young and shallow literary man, who poses as free-thinker and as critic of the Bishop's position. Mr. Gigadibs' implied opinion is, that a man of Blougram's intellect and broad views cannot, with honesty, hold and teach Roman Catholic dogma; that his position is anomalous and unideal. Blougram retorts with his voluminous and astonishingly clever "apology." In this apology we trace three distinct elements. First, there is a substratum of truth, truth, that is, in the abstract; then there is an application of these true principles to his own case and conduct, an application which is thoroughly unjustifiable—

"He said true things, but called them by wrong names—"

but which serves for an ingenious, and apparently, as regards Gigadibs, a triumphant, defence; finally, there is the real personal element, the man as he is. We are quite at liberty to suppose, even if we were not bound to suppose, that after all Blougram's defence is merely or partly ironical, and that he is not the contemptible creature he would be if we took him quite seriously. It is no secret that Blougram himself is, in the main, modelled after and meant for Cardinal Wiseman, who, it is said, was the writer of a good-humoured review of the poem in the Catholic journal, *The Rambler* (January, 1856). The supple, nervous strength and swiftness of the blank verse is, in its way, as fine as the qualities we have observed in the other monologues: there is a splendid "go" in it, a vast capacity for business; the verse is literally alive with meaning, packed with thought,

instinct with wit and irony; and not this only, but starred with passages of exquisite charm, such as that on "how some actor played Death on the stage," or that more famous one:—

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps!"

At least six of the poems contained in *Men and Women* deal with painting and music. But while four of these seem to fall into one group, the remaining two, *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi*, properly belong, though themselves the greatest of the art-poems as art-poems, to the group of monodramas already noticed. But *Old Pictures in Florence*, *The Guardian Angel*, *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha* and *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, are chiefly and distinctively notable in their relation to art, or to some special picture or piece of music.

The Guardian Angel is a "translation into song" of Guercino's picture of that name (*L'Angelo Custode*). It is addressed to "Waring," and was written by Browning at Ancona, after visiting with Mrs. Browning the church of San Agostino at Fano, which contains the picture. This touching and sympathetic little poem is Browning's only detailed description of a picture; but it is of more interest as an expression of personal feeling. Something in its sentiment has made it one of the most

popular of his poems. *Old Pictures in Florence* is a humorous and earnest moralising on the meaning and mission of art and the rights and wrongs of artists, suggested by some of the old pictures in Florence. It contains perhaps the most complete and particular statement of Browning's artistic principles that we have anywhere in his work, as well as a very noble and energetic outburst of indignant enthusiasm on behalf of the "early masters," the lesser older men whom the world slurs over or forgets. The principles which Browning imputes to the early painters may be applied to poetry as well as to art. Very characteristic and significant is the insistence on the deeper value of life, of soul, than of mere expression or technique, or even of mere unbreathing beauty. *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha* is the humorous soliloquy of an imaginary organist over a fugue in F minor by an imaginary composer, named in the title. It is a mingling of music and moralising. The famous description of a fugue, and the personification of its five voices, is a brilliantly ingenious *tour de force;* and the rough humour is quite in keeping with the *dramatis persona*. In complete contrast to *Master Hugues* is *A Toccata of Galuppi's*,[1] one of the daintiest, most musical, most witching and haunting of Browning's poems, certainly one of his masterpieces as a lyric poet. It is a vision of Venice evoked from the shadowy Toccata, a vision of that delicious, brilliant, evanescent, worldly life, when

"Balls and masks began at midnight, burning ever to midday,"

[1] Baldassarre Galuppi, surnamed Buranello (1706-1785), was a Venetian composer of some distinction. "He was an immensely prolific composer," says Vernon Lee, "and abounded in melody, tender, pathetic, brilliant, which in its extreme simplicity and slightness occasionally rose to the highest beauty."—*Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, p. 101.

and the lover and his lady would break off their talk to listen while Galuppi

> "Sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord."

But "the eternal note of sadness" soon creeps in.

> "Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:
> 'Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.
>
> . . . .
>
> Dust and ashes!' So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
> Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
> Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old."

In this poem Browning has called up before us the whole aspect of Venetian life in the eighteenth century. In three other poems, among the most remarkable that he has ever written, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, *The Heretic's Tragedy* and *Holy-Cross Day*, he has realised and represented the life and temper of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. *A Grammarian's Funeral*, "shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe," gives the nobler spirit of the earlier pioneers of the Renaissance, men like Cyriac of Ancona and Filelfo, devoted pedants who broke ground in the restoration to the modern world of the civilisation and learning of ancient Greece and Rome. It gives this, the nobler and earlier spirit, as finely as *The Tomb at St. Praxed's* gives the later and grosser. In Browning's hands the figure of the old grammarian becomes heroic. "He settled *Hoti's* business," true; but he did something more than that. It is the spirit in

which the work is done, rather than the special work itself, here only relatively important, which is glorified. Is it too much to say that this is the noblest of all requiems ever chanted over the grave of the scholar?

"Here's the top peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there.
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living or dying."

The union of humour with intense seriousness, of the grotesque with the stately, is one that only Browning could have compassed, and the effect is singularly appropriate. As the disciples of the old humanist bear their dead master up to his grave on the mountain-top, chanting their dirge and eulogy, the lines of the poem seem actually to move to the steady climbing rhythm of their feet.

The Heretic's Tragedy: a Middle-Age Interlude, is described by the author as "a glimpse from the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay [last Grand-Master of the Templars], A.D. 1314, as distorted by the refraction from Flemish brain to brain during the course of a couple of centuries." Of all Browning's mediæval poems this is perhaps the greatest, as it is certainly the most original, the most astonishing. Its special "note" is indescribable, for there is nothing with which we can compare it.

If I say that it is perhaps the finest example in English poetry of the pure grotesque, I shall fail to interpret it aright to those who think of the grotesque as a synonym for the ugly and debased. If I call it fantastic, I shall do it less than justice in suggesting a certain lightness and flimsiness which are quite alien to its profound seriousness, a seriousness which touches on sublimity. Browning's power of sculpturing single situations is seldom shown in finer relief than in those poems in which he has seized upon some "occult eccentricity of history" or of legend, like this of *The Heretic's Tragedy*, or that in *Holy-Cross Day*, fashioning it into some quaint, curt, tragi-comic form. *Holy-Cross Day* expresses the feelings of the Jews, who were forced on this day (the 14th September) to attend an annual Christian sermon in Rome. A deliciously naïve extract from an imaginary *Diary by the Bishop's Secretary*, 1600, first sets forth the orthodox view of the case; then the poem tells us "what the Jews really said." Nothing more audaciously or more sardonically mirthful was ever written than the first part of this poem, with its

> "Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
> Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week;"

while the sudden transition to the sublime and steadfast Song of Death of Rabbi ben Ezra is an effect worthy of Heine: more than worthy. Heine would inevitably have put his tongue in his cheek again at the end.

With the three great mediæval poems should be named the slighter sketch of *Protus*. The first and last lines, describing two imaginary busts, are a fine instance of Browning's power of translating sense into sound.

Compare the smooth and sweet melody of the opening lines—

> "Among these latter busts we count by scores
> Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> One loves a baby-face, with violets there—
> Violets instead of laurels in the hair,—
> As they were all the little locks could bear"—

with the rasping vigour and strength of sound which point the contrast of the conclusion :—

> "Here's John the Smith's rough-hammered head. Great eye,
> Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can
> To give you the crown-grasper. What a man!"

One poem of absolutely unique order is the romance of "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came*." If it were not for certain lines, certain metaphors and images, here and there in his earlier works, we should find in this poem an exception to the rule of Browning's work so singular and startling as to be almost phenomenal. But in passages of *Pauline*, of *Paracelsus*, of the lyric written in 1836, and incorporated, more than twenty years later, with *James Lee's Wife*, we have distinct evidence of a certain reserve, as it were, of romantic sensibility, a certain tendency, which we may consider to have been consciously checked rather than early exhausted, towards the weird and fanciful. In *Childe Roland* all this latent sensibility receives full and final expression. The poem is very generally supposed to be an allegory, and a number of ingenious interpretations have been suggested, and the "Dark Tower" has been defined as Love, Life, Death and Truth. But, as a matter of fact, Browning, in writing it, had no allegorical intention whatever. It

was meant to be, and is, a pure romance. It was suggested by the line from Shakespeare which heads it, and was "built up," in Mrs. Orr's words, "of picturesque impressions, which have separately or collectively produced themselves in the author's mind, . . . including a tower which Mr. Browning once saw in the Carrara Mountains, a painting which caught his eye years later in Paris; and the figure of a horse in the tapestry in his own drawing-room."[1] The poem depicts the last adventure of a knight vowed to the quest of a certain "Dark Tower." The description of his journey across a strange and dreadful country is one of the ghastliest and most vivid in all poetry; ghastly without hope, without alleviation, without a momentary touch of contrast; vivid and ghastly as the lines following:—

"A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek."

[1] *Handbook*, p. 266. The poem was written at Paris, January 3, 1852.

The manner of the poem, wholly unlike that of any other poem, may be described by varying Flaubert's phrase of "epic realism": it is romantic realism. The weird, fantastic and profoundly imaginative picture brought before us with such startling and almost oppressive vividness, is not painted in a style of vague suggestiveness, but in a hard, distinct, definite, realistic way, the realism which results from a faithful record of distorted impressions. The poet's imagination is like a flash of lightning which strikes through the darkness, flickering above the earth, and lighting up, point by point, with a momentary and fearful distinctness, the horrors of the landscape.

A large and important group of *Men and Women* consists of love-poems, or poems dealing, generally in some concrete and dramatic way, sometimes in a purely lyrical manner, with the emotion of love. *Love among the Ruins*, a masterpiece of an absolutely original kind, is the idyl of a lover's meeting, in which the emotion is emphasised and developed by the contrast of its surroundings. The lovers meet in a turret among the ruins of an ancient city, and the moment chosen is immediately before their meeting, when the lover gazes around him, struck into sudden meditation by the vision of the mighty city fallen and of the living might of Love.

"And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
 Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
And the slopes and rills and undistinguished grey
 Melt away—
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
 Waits me there

In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

For he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best."

The quaint chime or tinkle of a metre made out of the cadence of sheep-bells renders with curious felicity the quietness and fervent meditation of the subject. *A Lovers' Quarrel* is in every respect a contrast. It is a whimsical and delicious lyric, with a flowing and leaping melody, a light and piquant music deepened into pathos by a mournful undertone of retrospect and regret, not without a hope for the future. All Browning is seen in this

pathetic gaiety, this eagerness and unrest and passionate make-believe of a lover's mood. *Evelyn Hope* strikes a tenderer note; it is one of Browning's sweetest, simplest and most pathetic pieces, and embodies, in a concrete form, one of his deepest convictions. It is the lament of a man, no longer young, by the death-bed of a young girl whom he has loved, unknown to her. She has died scarcely knowing him, not even suspecting his love. But what matter? God creates love to reward love, and there is another life to come.

> "So hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep
> See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
> There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
> You will wake, and remember, and understand."

A Woman's Last Word is an exquisite little lyric which sings itself to its own music of delicate gravity and gentle pathos; but it too holds, in its few small lines, a complete situation, that most pathetic one in which a woman resolves to merge her individuality in the wish and will of her husband, to bind, for his sake, her intellect in the chains of her heart.

"A Woman's Last Word.

I.

Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
—Only sleep!

II.

What so wild as words are?
I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

III.

See the creature stalking
  While we speak!
Hush and hide the talking,
  Cheek on cheek!

IV.

What so false as truth is,
  False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is,
  Shun the tree—

V.

Where the apple reddens
  Never pry—
Lest we lose our Edens,
  Eve and I.

VI.

Be a god and hold me
  With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
  With thine arm!

VII.

Teach me, only teach, Love!
  As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
  Think thy thought—

VIII.

Meet, if thou require it,
  Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
  In thy hands.

IX.

That shall be to-morrow
  Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
  Out of sight:

X.

—Must a little weep, Love,
  (Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
  Loved by thee."

Any Wife to any Husband is the grave and mournful lament of a dying woman, addressed to the husband whose love has never wavered throughout her life, but whose faithlessness to her memory she foresees. The situation is novel in poetry, and it is realised with an intense sympathy and depth of feeling. The tone of dignified sadness in the woman's words, never passionate or pleading, only confirmed and hopeless, is admirably rendered in the slow and solemn metre, whose firm smoothness and regularity translate into sound the sentiment of the speech. *A Serenade at the Villa*, which expresses a hopeless love from the man's side, has a special picturesqueness, and something more than picturesqueness: nature and life are seen in throbbing sympathy. The little touches of description give one the very sense of the hot thundrous summer night as it "sultrily suspires" in sympathy with the disconsolate lover at his fruitless serenading. I can scarcely doubt that this poem (some of which has been quoted on p. 25 above), was suggested by one of the songs in Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, a poem on the same subject in the same rare metre:—

"Who is it that this dark night
 Underneath my window plaineth?
 It is one who from thy sight
 Being, ah! exiled, disdaineth
 Every other vulgar light."

If Browning's love-poems have any model or anticipation in English poetry, it is certainly in the love-songs of Sidney, in what Browning himself has called,

> "The silver speech,
> Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin."

No lover in English poetry has been so much a man as Sidney and Browning.

Two in the Campagna presents a more intricate situation than most of the love-poems. It is the lament of a man, addressed to the woman at his side, whom he loves and by whom he is loved, over the imperfection and innocent inconstancy of his love. The two can never quite grow to one, and he, oppressed by the terrible burden of imperfect sympathies, is for ever seeking, realising, losing, then again seeking the spiritual union still for ever denied. The vague sense of the Roman Campagna is distilled into exquisite words, and through all there sounds the sad and weary undertone of baffled endeavour :—

> "Infinite passion, and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn."

The Last Ride Together is one of those love-poems which I have spoken of as specially noble and unique, and it is, I think, the noblest and most truly unique of them all. Thought, emotion and melody are mingled in perfect measure: it has the lyrical "cry," and the objectiveness of the drama. The situation, sufficiently indicated in the title, is selected with a choice and happy instinct: the very motion of riding is given in the rhythm. Every line throbs with passion, or with a

fervid meditation which is almost passion, and in the last verse, and, still more, in the single line—

"Who knows but the world may end to-night?"

the dramatic intensity strikes as with an electric shock.

By the Fireside, though in all its circumstances purely dramatic and imaginary, rises again and again to the fervour of personal feeling, and we can hardly be wrong in classing it, in soul though not in circumstance, with *One Word More* and the other sacred poems which enshrine the memory of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. But, apart from this suggestion, the poem is a masterpiece of subtle simplicity and picturesqueness. Nothing could be more admirable in themselves than the natural descriptions throughout; but these are never mere isolated descriptions, nor even a mere stationary background: they are fused with the emotion which they both help to form and assist in revealing.

One Word More (*To E. B. B.*) is one of those sacred poems in which, once and again, a great poet has embalmed in immortal words the holiest and deepest emotion of his existence. Here, and here only in the songs consecrated by the husband to the wife, the living love that too soon became a memory is still "a hope, to sing by gladly." *One Word More* is Browning's answer to the *Sonnets from the Portuguese.* And, just as Mrs. Browning never wrote anything more perfect than the *Sonnets*, so Browning has never written anything more perfect than the answering lyric.

Yet another section of this most richly varied volume consists of poems, narrative and lyrical, dealing in a brief and pregnant way with some special episode or

emotion: love, in some instances, but in a less exclusive way than in the love-poems proper. *The Statue and the Bust* (one of Browning's best narratives) is a romantic and mainly true tale, written in *terza rima*, but in short lines. The story on which it is founded is a Florentine tradition.

"In the piazza of the SS. Annunziata at Florence is an equestrian statue of the Grand Duke Ferdinand the First, representing him as riding away from the church, with his head turned in the direction of the Riccardi [now Antinori] Palace, which occupies one corner of the square. Tradition asserts that he loved a lady whom her husband's jealousy kept a prisoner there; and that he avenged his love by placing himself in effigy where his glance could always dwell upon her." [1]

In the poem the lovers agree to fly together, but the flight, postponed for ever, never comes to pass. Browning characteristically blames them for their sin of "the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin," for their vacillating purpose, their failure in attaining "their life's set end," whatever that end might be. Despite the difficulty of the metre, the verse is singularly fresh and musical. In this poem, the first in which Browning has used the *terza rima*, he observes, with only occasional licence, the proper pause at the end of each stanza of three lines. This law, though rarely neglected by Dante, has seldom been observed by the few English poets who have attempted the measure. Neither Byron in the *Prophecy of Dante*, nor Shelley in *The Triumph of Life*, nor Mrs. Browning in *Casa Guidi Windows*, has done so. In Browning's later poems in this metre, the pause, as if of set purpose, is wholly disregarded.

[1] Mrs Orr, *Handbook*, p. 201.

How it strikes a Contemporary is at once a dramatic monologue and a piece of poetic criticism. Under the Spanish dress, and beneath the humorous treatment, it is easy to see a very distinct, suggestive and individual theory of poetry, and in the poet who "took such cognizance of men and things, . . .

"Of all thought, said and acted, then went home
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King—"

we have, making full allowance for the imaginary dramatic circumstances, a very good likeness of a poet of Browning's order. Another poem, "*Transcendentalism*," is a slighter piece of humorous criticism, possibly self-criticism, addressed to one who "speaks" his thoughts instead of "singing" them. Both have a penetrating quality of beauty in familiarity.

Before and *After*, which mean before and after the duel, realise between them a single and striking situation. *Before* is spoken by a friend of the wronged man ; *After* by the wronged man himself. The latter is not excelled by any poem of Browning's in its terrible conciseness, the intensity of its utterance of stifled passion.

"AFTER.

"Take the cloak from his face, and at first
Let the corpse do its worst !

"How he lies in his rights of a man !
Death has done all death can.
And, absorbed in the new life he leads,
He recks not, he heeds
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance ; both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.

Ha, what avails death to erase
  His offence, my disgrace ?
I would we were boys as of old
  In the field, by the fold
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn,
  Were so easily borne !
I stand here now, he lies in his place :
  Cover the face ! "

I know of no piece of verse in the language which has more of the quality and hush of awe in it than this little fragment of eighteen lines.

Instans Tyrannus[1] (the Threatening Tyrant) recalls by its motive, however unlike it may be as a poem, the *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*. The situations are widely different, but the root of each is identical. In both is developed the mood of passive or active hate, arising from mere instinctive dislike. But while in the earlier poem the theme is treated with boisterous sardonic humour, it is here embodied in the grave figure of a stern, single-minded, relentless hater, a tyrant in both senses of the term. Another poem, representing an act of will, though here it is love, not hate, that impels, is *Mesmerism*. The intense absorption, the breathless eagerness of the mesmerist, are rendered in a really marvellous way by the breathless and yet measured race of the verses : fifteen stanzas succeed one another without a single full-stop, or a real pause in sense or sound. The beautiful and significant little poem called *The Patriot : an old Story*, is a narrative and parable at once, and only too credible and convincing as each. *Respectability* holds in its three stanzas all that is vital and enviable in the real

[1] The poem was suggested by the opening of the third ode of the third Book of Horace: "Justum et tenacem propositi virum."

"Bohemia," and is the first of several poems of escape, which culminate in *Fifine at the Fair*. Both here and in another short suggestive poem, *A Light Woman* (which might be called the fourth act of a tragedy), the situation is outlined like a silhouette. Equally graphic, in the more ordinary sense of the term, is the picturesque and whimsical view of town and country life taken by a frivolous Italian person of quality in the poem named *Up at a Villa—Down in the City*, "a masterpiece of irony and of description," as an Italian critic has defined it.

Of the wealth of lyrics and short poems no adequate count can here be made. Yet, I cannot pass without a word, if only in a word may I indicate, the admirable craftsmanship and playful dexterity of the lines on *A Pretty Woman*; the pathetic feeling and the exquisite and novel music of *Love in a Life and Life in a Love*; the tense emotion, the suppressed and hopeful passion, of *In Three Days*, and the sad and haunting song of *In a Year*, with its winding and liquid melody, its mournful and wondering lament over love forgotten; the rich and marvellously modulated music, the glowing colour, the vivid and passionate fancy, of *Women and Roses*; the fresh felicity of "*De Gustibus*," with its enthusiasm for Italy scarcely less fervid than the English enthusiasm of the *Home-Thoughts*; the quaint humour and pregnant simplicity of the admirable little parable of *The Twins*; the sympathetic charm and light touch of *Misconceptions*, and the pretty figurative fancy of *My Star*; the strong, sad, suggestive little poem named *One Way of Love*, with its delicately-wrought companion *Another Way of Love*, the former a love-lyric to be classed with *The Lost Mistress* and *The Last Ride Together*; and, finally, the

epilogue to the first volume and a late poem in the second: *Memorabilia*, a tribute to Shelley, full of grateful remembrance and admiring love, significant among the few personal utterances of the poet, and the not less lovely poem and only less fervent tribute to Keats, the sumptuous, gorgeous, and sardonic lines on *Popularity*. A careful study or even, one would think, a careless perusal, of but a few of the poems named above, should be enough to show, once and for all, the infinite richness and variety of Browning's melody, and his complete mastery over the most simple and the most intricate lyric measures. As an example of the finest artistic simplicity, rich with restrained pathos and quiet with keen tension of feeling, we may choose the following.

"One Way of Love

I.

All June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II.

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing?

III.

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove

And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Love who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!"

IN A BALCONY.[1]

[Written at Bagni di Lucca, 1853; published in *Men and Women*, above; reprinted in *Poetical Works*, 1863, under a separate heading; *id.*, 1889 (Vol. VII. pp. 1-41). Performed at the Browning Society's Third Annual Entertainment, Prince's Hall, Piccadilly, Nov. 28, 1884, and by the English Drama Society at the Victoria Hall, June 8, 1905.]

The dramatic scene of *In a Balcony* is the last of the works written in dialogue. We have seen, in tracing the course of the plays from *Strafford* to *A Soul's Tragedy*, how the playwright gave place to the poet; how the stage construction, the brisk and interchanged dialogue of the earlier dramas, gradually and inevitably developed into the more subtle, the more lengthy dialogue, which itself approached more and more nearly to monologue, of the later ones. *In a Balcony*, written eight years later than *A Soul's Tragedy*, has more affinity with it, in form at least, than with any other of the plays. But while the situation there was purely intellectual and moral, it is here passionate and highly-wrought, to a degree never before reached, except in the crowning scene of *Pippa Passes*. We must go to the greatest among the Elizabethans to exceed that; we must turn to *Le Roi s'amuse* to equal this.

[1] It will be more convenient to treat *In a Balcony* in a separate section than under the general heading of *Men and Women*, for it is, to all intents and purposes, an independent work of another order.

The situation is, in one sense, extremely subtle; in another, remarkably simple. The action takes place within a few hours, on a balcony at night. Norbert and Constance are two lovers. Norbert is in the service of a certain Queen, to whom he has, by his diplomatic skill and labour, rendered great services. His aim, all the while, though unknown, as he thinks, to her, has been the hope of winning Constance, the Queen's cousin and dependant. He is now about to claim her as his recompense; but Constance, fearing for the result, persuades him, reluctant though he is, to ask in a roundabout way, so as to flatter or touch the Queen. He over-acts his part. The Queen, a heart-starved and now ageing woman, believes that he loves her, and responds to him with the passion of a long-thwarted nature. She announces the wonderful news, with more than the ecstasy of a girl, to Constance. Constance resolves to resign her lover, for his good and the Queen's, and, when he appears, she endeavours to make him understand and enter into her plot. But he cannot and will not see it. In the presence of the Queen he declares his love for Constance, and for her alone. The Queen goes out, in white silence. The lovers embrace in new knowledge and fervour of love. Measured steps are heard within, and we know that the guard is approaching.

Each of the three characters is admirably delineated. Norbert is a fine, strong, solid, noble character, without subtlety or mixture of motives. He loves Constance: he knows that his love is returned: he is resolved to win her hand. From first to last he is himself, honest, straightforward, single-minded, passionate; presenting

the strongest contrast to Constance's feminine over-subtlety. Constance is more, very much more, of a problem : "a character," as Mr. Wedmore has admirably said, "peculiarly wily for goodness, curiously rich in resource for unalloyed and inexperienced virtue." Does her proposal to relinquish Norbert in favour of the Queen show her to have been lacking in love for him? It has been said, on the one hand, that her act was "noble and magnanimous," on the other hand, that the act proved her nature to be "radically insincere and inconstant." Probably the truth lies between these two extremes. Her love, we cannot doubt, was true and intense up to the measure of her capacity; but her nature was, instinctively, less outspoken and truthful than Norbert's, more subtle, more reasoning. At the critical moment she is seized by a whirl of emotions, and, with very feminine but singularly unloverlike instinct, she resolves, as she would phrase it, to sacrifice *herself*, not seeing that she is insulting her lover by the very notion of his accepting such a sacrifice. Her character has not the pure and steadfast nobility of Norbert's, but it has the capacity of devotion, and it is genuinely human. The Queen, unlike Constance, but like Norbert, is simple and single in nature. She is a tragic and intense figure, at once pathetic and terrible. I am not aware that the peculiarly pregnant motive : the hidden longing for love in a starved and stunted nature, clogged with restrictions of state and ceremony, harassed and hampered by circumstances and by the weight of advancing years ; the passionate longing suddenly met, as it seems, with reward, and breaking out into a great flame of love and ardour, only to be rudely and finally quenched : I

am not aware that this motive has ever elsewhere been worked out in dramatic poetry. As here developed, it is among the great situations in literature.

The verse in which this little tragedy is written has, perhaps, more flexibility than that of any of the formal dramas. It has a strong and fine harmony, a weight and measure, and above all that pungent naturalness which belongs to the period of *Andrea del Sarto* and the other great monologues.

16. DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

[Published in 1864 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. VII., pp. 43-255).]

Dramatis Personæ, like *Men and Women* (which it followed after an interval of nine years) is a collection of dramatic monologues, in each of which it is attempted to delineate a single character or a single mood by setting the "imaginary person" in some revealing situation. Of the two possible methods, speech and soliloquy, Browning for the most part prefers the former. In *Dramatis Personæ*, however, he recurs, rather more frequently than usual, to the latter; and the situations imaged are usually suggestive rather than explicit, more incomplete and indirect than those in the *Men and Women*. As an ingenious critic said, shortly after the volume was published, "Mr Browning lets us overhear a part of the drama, generally a soliloquy, and we must infer the rest. Had he to give the story of *Hamlet*, he would probably embody it in three stanzas, the first beginning, 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt!' the second 'To be or not to be, that is the question;' and the third, 'Look

here upon this picture, and on that!' From these disjointed utterances the reader would have to construct the story." Here our critic's clever ingenuity carries him a little too far; but there is some truth in his definition or description of the special manner which characterises such poems as *Too Late*, or *The Worst of It*. But not merely the manner of presentment, the substance, and also the style and versification, have undergone a change during the long-silent years which lie between *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personæ*. The first note of change, of the change which makes us speak of earlier and later work, is here sounded. From 1833 up to 1855 forms a single period of steady development, of gradual and unswerving ascent. *Dramatis Personæ* stands on the border line between this period and another, the "later period," which more decisively begins with *The Ring and the Book*. Still, the first note of divergence is certainly sounded here. I might point to the profound intellectual depth of certain pieces as its characteristic, or, equally, to the traces here and there of an apparent carelessness of workmanship; or, yet again, to the new and very marked partiality for scenes and situations of English and modern rather than of mediæval and foreign life.

The larger part of the volume consists of dramatic monologues. Three only are in blank verse; the greater number in varied lyric measures. The first of these, and the longest, *James Lee*, as it was first called, *James Lee's Wife*,[1] as it is now more appropriately named, is

[1] The first six stanzas of the sixth section of this poem, the splendid song of the wind, were published in a magazine, as *Lines*, in 1836. Parts II. & III., of Section VIII. (except the last two lines) were added to the poem in 1868.

a *Lieder Kreis*, or cycle of songs, nine in number, which reveal, in "tragic hints," not by means of a connected narrative, the history of an unhappy marriage. There is nothing in it of heroic action or suffering; it is one of those old stories always new which are always tragic to one at least of the actors in them, and which may be tragic or trivial in record, according as the artist is able to mould his material. Each of the sections shows us a mood, signalized by some slight link of circumstance which may the better enable us to grasp it. The development of disillusion, the melancholy progress of change, is finely indicated in the successive stages of this lyric sequence, from the first clear strain of believing love (shaken already by a faint tremor of fear), through gradual alienation and inevitable severance, to the final resolved parting. This poem is worthy of notice as the only one in which Browning has employed the sequence form; almost the only instance, indeed, in which he has structurally varied his metre in the course of a poem.

James Lee's Wife is written in the form of soliloquy, or reflection. In two other poems, closely allied to it in sentiment, *The Worst of it* and *Too Late*, intense feeling expresses itself, though in solitude, as if the object of emotion were present; each is, in great part, a mental appeal to some one loved and lost. In *James Lee's Wife* a woman was the speaker, and the burden of her lament was mere estrangement. *The Worst of it* and *Too Late* are both spoken by men. The former is the utterance of a man whose wife has been false to him; the latter of a man whose loved one is dead. But in each case the situation is further complicated. The

woman over whose loss of virtue her forsaken husband mourns with passionate anguish and unavailing bitterness of regret, has been to him, whom she now leaves for another, an image of purity: her love and influence have lifted him from the mire, and "the Worst of it," the last pang which he cannot nerve himself to endure, is the knowledge that she had saved him, and, partly at least through him, ruined herself. The poem is one of the most passionate and direct of Browning's dramatic lyrics: it is thrillingly intense and alive; and the swift force and tremulous eagerness of its very original rhythm and metre translate its sense into sound with perfect fitness. Similar in cadence, though different in arrangement, is the measure of *Too Late*, with its singularly constructed stanza of two quatrains, followed respectively by two couplets, which together made another quatrain. It is worth noticing how admirably and uniformly Browning contrives to connect, in sound, the two halves of the broken quatrains, placing them so as to complete each other, and relieve our ear of the sense of distance. The poem is spoken by a lover who was neither rejected nor accepted: like the lover of Evelyn Hope, he never told his love. His Edith married another, a heartless and soulless lay-figure of a poet (or so at least his rival regards him), and now she is dead. His vague but vivid hopes of some future chance to love her and be loved; the dull rebellion of rashly reasoning sorrow; the remembrance, the repentance, the regret; are all poured out with pathetic naturalness.

These three poems are soliloquies; *Dîs aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours*, a poem closely akin in sentiment and style, recurs to the more frequent and perhaps

preferable manner of speech to an imagined listener. It is written in that favourite stanza of five lines, on which Browning has played so many variations: here, perhaps, in the internal rhyme so oddly placed, the newest and most ingenious of all. The sentiment and situation are the exact complement or contrast of those expressed in *By the Fireside.* There, fate and nature have brought to a crisis the latent love of two persons: the opportunity is seized, and the crown of life obtained. Here, in circumstances singularly similar, the vital moment is let slip, the tide is *not* taken at the turn. And ten years afterwards, when the famous poet and the girl whom he all but let himself love, meet in a Paris drawing-room, and one of them tells the old tale over for the instruction of both, she can point out, with bitter earnestness and irony (and a perfect little touch of feminine nature) his fatal mistake.

Youth and Art is a slighter and more humorous sketch, with a somewhat similar moral. It has wise humour, sharp characterisation, and ballad-like simplicity. Still more perfect a poem, still more subtle, still more Heinesque, if it were not better than Heine, is the little piece called *Confessions.* The pathetic, humorous, rambling snatch of final memory in the dying man, addressed, by a delightful irony, to the attendant clergyman, has a sort of grim ecstasy, and the end is one of the most triumphant things in this kind of poetry.

"Confessions.

I.

What is he buzzing in my ears?
'Now that I come to die,

Do I view the world as a vale of tears?'
  Ah, reverend sir, not I!

II.

What I viewed there once, what I view again
  Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,
  With a wall to my bedside hand.

III.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
  From a house you could descry
O'er the garden wall; is the curtain blue
  Or green to a healthy eye?

IV.

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
  Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labelled 'Ether'
  Is the house o'er-topping all.

V.

At a terrace, somewhat near the stopper,
  There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
  My poor mind's out of tune.

VI.

Only, there was a way . . you crept
  Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
  They styled their house 'The Lodge.'

VII.

What right had a lounger up their lane?
  But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
  And stretch themselves to Oes,

VIII.

Yet never catch her and me together,
  As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled 'Ether,'
  And stole from stair to stair,

IX.

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
  We loved, sir,—used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was—
  But then, how it was sweet!"

A Likeness forms a third, and a good third, to these two fine and subtle studies of modern English life. It is one of those poems which, because they seem simple and superficial, and can be galloped off the tongue in a racing jingle, we are apt to underrate or overlook. Yet it would be difficult to find a more vivid bit of *genre* painting than the three-panelled picture in this single frame.

The three blank verse poems which complete the series of purely dramatic pieces, *A Death in the Desert*, *Caliban upon Setebos* and *Mr. Sludge*, "*The Medium*," are more elaborate than any yet named. They follow, to a considerable extent, the form of the blank verse monologues which are the glory of *Men and Women*. Alike in their qualities and defects they represent a further step in development. The next step will lead to the elaborate and extended monologues which comprise the greater part of Browning's later works.

A *Death in the Desert* is an argument in a dramatic frame-work. The situation imaged is that of the mysterious death of St. John in extreme old age. The background to the last utterance of the apostle is painted with

marvellous brilliance and tenderness: every circumstance is conceived and represented in that pictorial style, in which a word is equal to a touch of the brush of a great painter. But, delicately as the circumstances and surroundings are indicated, it is as an argument that the poem is mainly left to exist. The bearing of this argument on contemporary theories may to some appear a merit, to others a blemish. To make the dying John refute Strauss or Renan, handling their propositions with admirable dialectical skill, is certainly, on the face of it, somewhat hazardous. But I can see no real incongruity in imputing to the seer of Patmos a prophetic insight into the future, no real inconsequence in imagining the opponent of Cerinthus spending his last breath in the defence of Christian truth against a foreseen scepticism. In style, the poem a little recalls *Cleon*; with less of harmonious grace and clear classic outline, it possesses a certain stilled sweetness, a meditative tenderness, all its own, and certainly appropriate to the utterance of the "beloved disciple."

Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island,[1] is more of a creation, and a much greater poem, than *A Death in the Desert.* It is sometimes forgotten that the grotesque has its own region in art. The region of the grotesque has been well defined, in connection with this poem, in a paper read by Mr. Cotter Morison before the Browning Society. "Its proper province," he writes, "would seem to be the exhibition of fanciful power by the artist; not beauty or truth in the literal sense at all, but inventive affluence of unreal yet absurdly comic forms,

[1] The poem was originally preceded by the text, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (*Ps.* l. 21).

with just a flavour of the terrible added, to give a grim dignity, and save from the triviality of caricature."[1] With the exception of *The Heretic's Tragedy*, *Caliban upon Setebos* is probably the finest piece of grotesque art in the language. Browning's Caliban, unlike Shakespeare's, has no active part to play: if he has ever seen Stephano and Trinculo, he has forgotten it. He simply sprawls on the ground "now that the heat of day is best," and expounds for himself, for his own edification, his system of Natural Theology. I think Huxley has said that the poem is a truly scientific representation of the development of religious ideas in primitive man. It needed the subtlest of poets to apprehend and interpret the undeveloped ideas and sensations of a rudimentary and transitionally human creature like Caliban, to turn his dumb stirrings of quaint fancies into words, and to do all this without a discord. The finest poetical effect is in the close: it is indeed one of the finest effects, climaxes, *surprises*, in literature. Caliban has been venturing to talk rather disrespectfully of his God; believing himself overlooked, he has allowed himself to speak out his mind on religious questions. He chuckles to himself in safe self-complacency. All at once—

"What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!
Crickets stop hissing; not a bird—or, yes,
There scuds His raven that hath told Him all!
It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze—
A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there, there,
His thunder follows! Fool to jibe at Him!
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!

[1] *Browning Society's Papers*, Part V., p. 493.

'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!"

Mr. Sludge, "*The Medium*" is equally remote from both the other poems in blank verse. It is a humorous and realistic tale of modern spiritualism, suggested, it is said, by the life and adventures of the American medium, Home. Like *Bishop Blougram*, it is at once an exposure and an apologia. As a piece of analytic portraiture it would be difficult to surpass; and it is certainly a fault on the right side if the poet has endowed his precious blackguard with a dialectical head hardly to be expected on such shoulders; if, in short, he has made him nearly as clever as himself. When the critics complain that the characters of a novelist are too witty, the characters of a poet too profound, one cannot but feel thankful that it is once in a while possible for such strictures to be made. The style of *Mr. Sludge* is the very acme of colloquialism. It is not "what is commonly understood by poetry," certainly: but is it not poetry, all the same? If such a character as Sludge should be introduced into poetry at all, it is certain that no more characteristic expression could have been found for him. But should he be dealt with? We limit our poetry nowadays, to the length of our own tether; if we are unable to bring beauty out of every living thing, merely because it is alive, and because nature is beautiful in every movement, is it our own fault or nature's? Shakespeare and his age trusted nature, and were justified; in our own age only Browning has wholly trusted nature.

Scarcely second in importance to the dramatic group, comes the group of lyrical poems, some of which are

indeed, formally dramatic, that is, the "utterance of so many imaginary persons," but still in general tone and effect lyrical and even personal. *Abt Vogler* for instance, and *Rabbi ben Ezra*, might no doubt be considered instances of "vicarious thinking" on behalf of the modern German composer and the mediæval Jewish philosopher. But in neither case is there any distinct dramatic intention. The one is a deep personal utterance on music, the other a philosophy of life. But before I touch on these, which, with *Prospice*, are the most important and impressive of the remaining poems, I should name the two or three lesser pieces, the exquisite and pregnant little elegy of love and mourning, *May and Death*; *A Face*, with its perfect clearness and fineness of suggestive portraiture, as lovely as the vignettes of Palma in *Sordello*, or as a real picture of the "Tuscan's early art"; the two octaves (not in the first edition) on Woolner's group of Constance and Arthur (*Deaf and Dumb*) and Sir Frederick Leighton's picture of *Eurydice and Orpheus*; and the two semi-narrative poems, *Gold Hair: a Story of Pornic*, and *Apparent Failure*, the former a vivid rendering of the strange story told in Brittany of a beautiful girl-miser, the latter a record and its stinging and consoling moral ("Poor men, God made, and all for that!") of a visit that Browning paid in 1850 to the Morgue.

Abt Vogler[1] ("after he has been extemporizing upon

[1] The Abt or Abbé George Joseph Vogler (born at Würzburg, Bavaria, in 1749, died at Darmstadt, 1824) was a composer, professor, kapelmeister and writer on music. Among his pupils were Weber and Meyerbeer. The "musical instrument of his invention" was called an orchestrion. "It was," says Sir G. Grove, "a very compact organ, in which four key-

the musical instrument of his invention") is an utterance on music which perhaps goes further than any attempt which has ever been made in verse to set forth the secret of the most sacred and illusive of the arts. Only the wonderful lines in the *Merchant of Venice* come anywhere near it. The wonder and beauty of it grow on one, as the wonder and beauty of a sky, of a sea, of a landscape, beautiful indeed and wonderful from the first, become momentarily more evident, intense and absorbing. Life, religion and music, the *Ganzen*, *Guten*, *Schönen* of existence, are combined in threefold unity, apprehended and interpreted in their essential spirit.

"Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?
    Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
  What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same!
    Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
  There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
    The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
  What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
    On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

  All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
    Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
  Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
    When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

boards of five octaves each, and a pedal board of thirty-six keys, with swell complete, were packed into a cube of nine feet."—(See Miss Marx's "Account of Abbé Vogler," in the *Browning Society's Papers*, Part III., p. 339).

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
  The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
  Enough that he heard it once; we shall hear it by-and-by.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
  For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
  Why rushed the discord in, but that harmony should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
  Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
  The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know."

In *Rabbi ben Ezra* Browning has crystallized his religious philosophy into a shape of abiding beauty. It has been called, not rashly, the noblest of modern religious poems. Alike in substance and in form it belongs to the highest order of meditative poetry; and it has, in Browning's work, an almost unique quality of grave beauty, of severe restraint, of earnest and measured enthusiasm. What the *Psalm of Life* is to the people who do not think, *Rabbi ben Ezra* might and should be to those who do: a light through the darkness, a lantern of guidance and a beacon of hope, to the wanderers lost and weary in the *selva selvaggia*. It is one of those poems that mould character. I can give only one or two of its most characteristic verses.

"Not on the vulgar mass
Called 'work' must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me.
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

. . . .

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"

The emotion and the measure of *Rabbi ben Ezra* have the chastened, sweet gravity of wise old age. *Prospice* has all the impetuous blood and fierce lyric fire of militant manhood. It is a cry of passionate exultation and exaltation in the very face of death: a war-cry of triumph over the last of foes. I would like to connect it with the quotation from Dante which Browning, in a published letter, tells us that he wrote in his wife's Testament after her death: "Thus I believe, thus I

affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured." If *Rabbi ben Ezra* has been excelled as a Song of Life, then *Prospice* may have been excelled as a Hymn of Death.

"PROSPICE.

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go;
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!"

Last of all comes the final word, the summary or conclusion of the whole matter, in the threefold speech of

the *Epilogue*, a comprehensive and suggestive vision of the religious life of humanity.

17. THE RING AND THE BOOK.

[Published, in 4 vols., in 1868-9: Vol. I., November, 1868; Vol. II., December, 1868; Vol. III., January, 1869; Vol. IV., February, 1869. In 12 Books: I., The Ring and the Book; II., Half-Rome; III., The Other Half-Rome; IV., Tertium Quid; V., Count Guido Franceschini; VI., Giuseppe Caponsacchi; VII., Pompilia; VIII., Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, Pauperum Procurator; IX., Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius, Fisci et Rev. Cam. Apostol. Advocatus; X., The Pope; XI., Guido; XII., The Book and the Ring. (*Poetical Works*, 1889; Vols. VIII.-X.)]

The Ring and the Book is at once the largest and the greatest of Browning's works, the culmination of his dramatic method, and the turning-point, more decisively than *Dramatis Personæ*, of his style. It consists of twelve books, the first and last being of the nature of Preface and Appendix. It embodies a single story, told ten times, each time from an individual standpoint, by nine different persons (one of them speaking twice), besides a summary of the story by the poet in the first book, and some additional particulars in the last. The method thus adopted is at once absolutely original and supremely difficult. To tell the same story, without mere repetition, no less than ten times over, to make each telling at once the same and new, a record of the same facts but of independent impressions, to convey by means of each monologue a sense of the speaker not less vivid and life-like than by the ordinary dramatic method, with a yet more profound measure of analytic and psychological

truth, and finally to group all these figures with unerring effect of prominence and subordination, to fuse and mould all these parts into one living whole is, as a *tour de force*, unique, and it is not only a *tour de force*. *The Ring and the Book*, besides being the longest poetical work of the century, must be ranked among the greatest poems in our literature : it has a spiritual insight, human science, dramatic and intellectual and moral force, a strength and grip, a subtlety, a range and variety of genius and of knowledge, hardly to be paralleled outside Shakespeare.

It has sometimes been said that the style of Browning is essentially undramatic, that Pompilia, Guido, and the lawyers all talk in the same way, that is, like Browning. As a matter of fact nothing is more remarkable than the variety of style, the cunning adjustment of language and of rhythm to the requirements of every speaker. From the general construction of the rhythm to the mere similies and figures of speech employed in passing, each monologue is absolutely individual, and, though each monologue contains a highly finished portrait of the character whose name it bears, these portraits, so far from being disconnected or independent, are linked together in as close an interdependence as the personages of a regularly constructed drama. The effect of the reiterated story, told in some new fashion by each new teller of it, has been compared with that of a great fugue, blending, with the threads of its crossing and recrossing voices, a single web of harmony. The "theme" is Pompilia; around her the whole action circles. As, in *Pippa Passes*, the mere passing of an innocent child, her unconscious influence on those on whom her song

breaks in at a moment of crisis, draws together the threads of many stories, so Pompilia, with hardly more consciousness of herself, makes and unmakes the lives and characters of those about her. The same sweet rectitude and purity of nature serve to call out the latent malignity of Guido and the slumbering chivalry of Caponsacchi. Without her, the one might have remained a "*petit maître* priestling;" the other merely a soured, cross-grained, impecunious country squire: Rome would have had no tragedy to talk about, nor we this book to read. It is in Pompilia that all the threads of action meet: she is the heroine, as neither Guido nor Caponsacchi can be called the hero.

The story of *The Ring and the Book*, like those of so many of the greatest works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, comes to us from Italy. Unlike Shakespeare's, however, but like one at least of Webster's two masterpieces, it is no legend, but the true story of a Roman murder-case, found (in all its main facts and outlines) in a square old yellow book, small-quarto size, part print, part manuscript, which Browning picked up for eightpence on a second-hand stall in the Piazza San Lorenzo at Florence, one day in June, 1865. The book was entitled (in Latin which Browning thus translates):—

"A Roman murder-case:
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cut-throats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,

Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight :
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit."

The book proved to be one of those contemporary records of famous trials which were not uncommon in Italy, and which are said to be still preserved in many Italian libraries. It contained the printed pleadings for and against the accused, the judicial sentence, and certain manuscript letters describing the efforts made on Guido's behalf and his final execution. This book (with a contemporary pamphlet which Browning afterwards met with in London) supplied the outlines of the poem to which it helped to give a name.

The story itself is a tragic one, rich in material for artistic handling, though not for the handling of every artist. But its importance is relatively inconsiderable. "I fused my live soul and that inert stuff," says the poet, and

"Thence bit by bit I dug
The ingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,—
Yes ; but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Makes it bear hammer and be firm to file.
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more ;
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break."

The story, in brief, is this. Pompilia, the supposed daughter of Pietro and Violante Comparini, an aged burgher couple of Rome, has been married, at the age of thirteen, to Count Guido Franceschini, an impoverished

middle-aged nobleman of Arezzo. The arrangement, in which Pompilia is, of course, quite passive, has been made with the expectation, on the part of Guido, of a large dowry; on the part of the Comparini, of an aristocratic alliance, and a princely board at Guido's palace. No sooner has the marriage taken place than both parties find that they have been tricked. Guido, disappointed of his money, and unable to reach the pair who have deceived him, vents his spite on the innocent victim, Pompilia. At length Pompilia, knowing that she is about to become a mother, escapes from her husband, aided by a good young priest, Giuseppe Caponsacchi, a canon of Arezzo; and a few months afterwards, at the house of her supposed parents, she gives birth to a son. A fortnight after the birth of his heir, Guido, who has been waiting till his hold on the dowry is thus secured, takes with him four cut-throats, steals by night to Rome, and kills his wife and the aged Comparini, leaving the child alive. He is captured the same night, and brought to judgment at Rome. When the poem opens, the case is being tried before the civil courts. No attempt is made to dispute the fact of Guido's actual committal of the deed; he has been caught red-handed, and Pompilia, preserved almost by miracle, has survived her wounds long enough to tell the whole story. The sole question is, whether the act had any justification; it being pretended by Guido that his wife had been guilty of adultery with the priest Caponsacchi, and that his deed was a simple act of justice. He was found guilty by the legal tribunal, and condemned to death; Pompilia's innocence being confirmed beyond a doubt. Guido then appealed to the Pope, who confirmed the judicial sentence. The

whole of the poem takes place between the arrest and trial of Guido, and the final sentence of the Pope; at the time, that is, when the hopes and fears of the actors, and the curiosity of the spectators, would be at their highest pitch.

The first book, entitled *The Ring and the Book*, gives the facts of the story, some hint of the author's interpretation of them, and the outlines of his plan. We are not permitted any of the interest of suspense. Browning shows us clearly from the first the whole bearing and consequence of events, as well as the right and wrong of them. He has written few finer passages than the swift and fiery narrative of the story, lived through in vision on the night of his purchase of the original documents. But complete and elaborate as this is, it is merely introductory, a prologue before the curtain rises on the drama. First we have three representative specimens of public opinion: *Half-Rome*, *The Other Half-Rome*, and *Tertium Quid*; each speaker presenting the complete case from his own point of view. "Half-Rome" takes the side of Guido. We are allowed to see that the speaker is a jealous husband, and that his judgment is biased by an instinctive sympathy with the presumably jealous husband, Guido. "The Other Half-Rome" takes the side of the wife, "Little Pompilia with the patient eyes," now lying in the hospital, mortally wounded, and waiting for death. This speaker is a bachelor, probably a young man, and his judgment is swayed by the beauty and the piteousness of the dying girl. The speech of "Half-Rome," being as it is an attempt to make light of the murder, and the utterance of a somewhat ridiculous personage, is exceedingly

humorous and colloquial; that of the "Other Half-Rome" is serious, earnest, sometimes eloquent. No contrast could be more complete than that presented by these two "sample-speeches." The objects remain the same, but we see them through different ends of the telescope. Either account taken by itself is so plausible as to seem almost morally conclusive. But in both instances we have down-right apology and condemnation, partiality bred of prejudice. *Tertium Quid* presents us with a reasoned and judicial judgment, impartiality bred of contempt or indifference; this being—

"What the superior social section thinks,
In person of some man of quality
Who,—breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist—
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase,
'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole:
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That,
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word . . .
How quality dissertated on the case."

"Tertium Quid" deals with the case very gently, mindful of his audience, to whom, at each point of the argument calling for judgment, he politely refers the matter, and passes on. He speaks in a tone of light and well-bred irony, with the aristocratic contempt for the *plebs*, the burgesses, Society's assumption of Exclusive Information. He gives the general view of things, clearly, neutrally, with no vulgar emphasis of black and

white. "I simply take the facts, ask what they mean."

So far we have had rumour alone, the opinions of outsiders; next come the three great monologues in which the persons of the drama, Count Guido, Caponsacchi, and Pompilia, bear witness of themselves.

"The imaginary occasion," says Mrs. Orr, "is that of Count Guido's trial, and all the depositions which were made on the previous one are transferred to this. The author has been obliged in every case to build up the character from the evidence, and to re-mould and expand the evidence in conformity with the character. The motive, feeling, and circumstance set forth by each separate speaker, are thus in some degree fictitious; but they are always founded upon fact, and the literal fact of a vast number of details is self-evident." [1]

These three monologues (with the second of Guido) are by far the most important in the book.

First comes *Count Guido Franceschini*. The two monologues spoken by him are, for sheer depth of human science, the most marvellous of all: "every nerve of the mind is touched by the patient scalpel, every vein and joint of the subtle and intricate spirit divided and laid bare." [2] Under torture, he has confessed to the murder of his wife. He is now permitted to defend himself before the judges.

"Soft-cushioned sits he; yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip,
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy;
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,

---

[1] *Handbook*, p. 93.
[2] Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, p. 220.

To passion . . . . .
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb ;
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase.

. . . .

And never once does he detach his eye
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself."

His speech is a tissue of falsehoods and prevarications: if he uses a fact, it is only to twist it into a form of self-justification. He knows it is useless to deny the murder ; his aim, then, is to explain and excuse it. Every device attainable by the instinct and the brain of hunted humanity he finds and uses. Now he slurs rapidly over an inconvenient fact ; now, with the frank audacity of innocence, proclaims and blazons it abroad ; now he is rhetorically eloquent, now ironically pathetic ; always contriving to shift the blame upon others, and to make his own course appear the only one plausible or possible, the only one possible, at least, to a high-born, law-abiding son of the Church. Every shift and twist is subtly adapted to his audience of Churchmen, and the gradation of his pleading no less subtly contrived. No keener and subtler special pleading has ever been written, in verse certainly, and possibly in lawyers' prose ; and it is poetry of the highest order of dramatic art.

Covering a narrower range, but still more significant within its own limits, the speech of *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*, the priest who assisted Pompilia in her flight to Rome (given now in her defence before the judges who have heard the defence of Guido) is perhaps the most passionate and thrilling piece of blank verse ever written by

Browning. Indeed, I doubt if it be an exaggeration to say that such fire, such pathos, such splendour of human speech, has never been heard or seen in English verse since Webster. In tone and colour the monologue is quite new, exquisitely modulated to a surprising music. The lighter passages are brilliant: the eloquent passages full of a fine austerity; but it is in those passages directly relating to Pompilia that the chief greatness of the work lies. There is in these appeals a quivering, thrilling, searching quality of fervid pathetic directness: I can give no notion of it in words; but here are a few lines, torn roughly out of their context, which may serve in some degree to illustrate my meaning:—

> "Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
> The last time in this life: not one sight since,
> Never another sight to be! And yet
> I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome:
> It seems I simply sent her to her death.
> You tell me she is dying now, or dead;
> I cannot bring myself to quite believe
> This is a place you torture people in:
> What if this your intelligence were just
> A subtlety, an honest wile to work
> On a man at unawares? 'Twere worthy you.
> No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
> That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
> That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
> That vision of the pale electric sword
> Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
> O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find—
> Know the manœuvre! Also herself said
> I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
> Let me see for myself if it be so!
> Though she were dying a priest might be of use,
> The more when he's a friend too,—she called me
> Far beyond 'friend.'"

Severed from its connection, much of the charm of the passage vanishes away: always the test of the finest dramatic work; but enough remains to give some faint shadow of the real beauty of the work. Observe how the rhythm trembles in accord with the emotion of the speaker: now slow, solemn, sad, with something of the quiet of despair; now strenuously self-deluding and feverishly eager: "Let me see for myself if it be so!" a line which has all the flush and gasp in it of broken sudden utterance. And the monologue ends in a kind of desperate resignation:—

"Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat;
Apart from truth's sake, what's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life.

. . . . . .

Mere delectation, fit for a minute's dream!—
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, 'Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!'—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

From the passionate defence of Caponsacchi, we pass to the death-bed of *Pompilia*. Like Shakespeare, Browning makes all his heroines young; and this child of seventeen, who has so much of the wisdom of youth, tells on her death-bed, to the kind people about her, the story of her life, in a simple, child-like, dreamy, wondering way, which can be compared, so far as I know, with nothing else ever written.

> "Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
> After the loud ones;"

and we have here the whole heart of a woman, the whole heart and the very speech and accent of the most womanly of women. No woman has ever written anything so close to the nature of women, and I do not know what other man has come near to this strange and profoundly manly intuition, this "piercing and overpowering tenderness which glorifies," as Mr. Swinburne has said, "the poet of Pompilia." All *The Ring and the Book* is a leading up to this monologue, and a commentary round it. It is a song of serene and quiet beauty, beautiful as evening-twilight. To analyse it is to analyse a rose's perfume: to quote from it is to tear off the petal of a rose. Here, however, for their mere colour and scent, are a few lines. Pompilia is speaking of the birth of her child.

> "A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine
> A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
> All women are not mothers of a boy,
> Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
> And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
> There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
> As if it would continue, broaden out

Happily more and more, and lead to heaven :
Christmas before me,—was not that a chance ?
I never realized God's birth before—
How He grew likest God in being born.
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers."

With a beautiful and holy confidence she now "lays away her babe with God," secure for him in the future. She forgives the husband who has slain her : "I could not love him, but his mother did." And with her last breath she blesses the friend who has saved her :—

"O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death.

. . . . . .

So, let him wait God's instant men call years ;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty ! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise."

After *Pompilia*, we have the pleadings and counter-pleadings of the lawyers on either side : *Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, Pauperum Procurator* (the counsel for the defendant), and *Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius, Fisci et Rev. Cam. Apostol. Advocatus* (public prosecutor). Arcangeli,—

"The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to the devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties !"—

is represented, with fine grotesque humour, in the very act of making his speech, pre-occupied, all the while he

"wheezes out law and whiffles Latin forth," with a birthday-feast in preparation for his eight-year-old son, little Giacinto, the pride of his heart. The effect is very comic, though the alternation or intermixture of lawyer's-Latin and domestic arrangements produces something which is certainly, and perhaps happily, without parallel in poetry. His defence is, and is intended to be, mere quibbling. *Causâ honoris* is the whole pith and point of his plea: Pompilia's guilt he simply takes for granted. Bottini, the exact opposite in every way of his adversary,—

> "A man of ready smile and facile tear,
> Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
> And language—ah, the gift of eloquence!
> Language that goes as easy as a glove
> O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one"—

Bottini presents us with a full-blown speech, intended to prove Pompilia's innocence, though really in every word a confession of her utter depravity. His sole purpose is to show off his cleverness, and he brings forward objections on purpose to prove how well he can turn them off; assumes guilt for the purpose of arguing it into comparative innocence.

> "Yet for the sacredness of argument, . . .
> Anything, anything to let the wheels
> Of argument run glibly to their goal!"

He pretends to "paint a saint," whom he can still speak of, in tones of earnest admiration, as "wily as an eel." His implied concessions and merely parenthetic denials, his abominable insinuations and suggestions, come, evidently enough, from the instincts of a grovelling mind,

literally incapable of appreciating goodness, as well as from professional irritation at one who will

> "Leave a lawyer nothing to excuse,
> Reason away and show his skill about."

The whole speech is a capital bit of satire and irony; it is comically clever and delightfully exasperating.

After the lawyers have spoken, we have the final judgment, the summing-up and laying bare of the whole matter, fact and motive, in the soliloquy of *The Pope*. Guido has been tried and found guilty, but, on appeal, the case had been referred to the Pope, Innocent XII. His decision is made; he has been studying the case from early morning, and now, at the

> "Dim
> Droop of a sombre February day,
> In the plain closet where he does such work,
> With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
> One table and one lathen crucifix,"

he passes the actors of the tragedy in one last review, nerving himself to pronounce the condemnation which he feels, as judge, to be due, but which he shrinks from with the natural shrinking of an aged man about to send a strong man to death before him. Pompilia he pronounces faultless and more,—

> "My rose, I gather for the breast of God;"

Caponsacchi, not all without fault, yet a true soldier of God, prompt, for all his former seeming frivolousness, to spring forward and redress the wrong, victorious, too, over temptation:—

> "Was the trial sore?
> Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!

Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray
'Lead us into no such temptation, Lord!'
Yea, but, O Thou, whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise!"

For Guido he can see no excuse, can find no loophole for mercy, and but little hope of penitence or salvation, and he signs the death-warrant.

"For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark,
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see; one instant, and be saved."

The whole monologue is of different order from all the others. Every one but this expresses a more or less partial and fragmentary view. *Tertium Quid* alone makes any pretence at impartiality, and his is the result of indifference, not of justice. The Pope's speech is long, slow, discoursive, full of aged wisdom, dignity and nobility. The latter part of it, containing some of Browning's most characteristic philosophy, is by no means out of place, but perfectly coherent and appropriate to the character of the speaker.

Last of all comes the second and final speech of *Guido*,

"the same man, another voice," as he "speaks and despairs, the last night of his life," before the Cardinal Acciaiuoli and Abate Panciatichi, two old friends, who have come to obtain his confession, absolve him, and accompany him to the scaffold :—

> "The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
> That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
> Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth join ;
> Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
> They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
> While his feet fumble for the filth below ;
> The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
> Working his best with beads and cross to ban
> The enemy that come in like a flood
> Spite of the standard set up, verily
> And in no trope at all, against him there :
> For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
> Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
> Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
> And settle down in silence solidly,
> Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death."

We have here the completed portrait of Guido, a portrait perhaps unsurpassed as a whole by any of Browning's studies in the complexities of character. In his first speech he fought warily, and with delicate skill of fence, for life. Here, says Mr. Swinburne, "a close and dumb soul compelled into speech by mere struggle and stress of things, labours in literal translation and accurate agony at the lips of Guido." Hopeless, but impelled by the biting frenzy of despair, he pours out on his awe-stricken listeners a wild flood of entreaty, defiance, ghastly and anguished humour, flattery, satire, raving blasphemy and foaming impenitence. His desperate venom and blasphemous raillery is part despair, part calculated horror. In his

last revolt against death and all his foes, he snatches at any weapon, even truth, that may serve his purpose and gain a reprieve :—

> "I thought you would not slay impenitence,
> But teazed, from men you slew, contrition first,—
> I thought you had a conscience . . .
> Would you send
> A soul straight to perdition, dying frank
> An atheist ?"

How much of truth there is in it all we need not attempt to decide. It is not likely that Guido could pretend to be much worse than he really was, though he unquestionably heightens the key of his crime, working up to a pitch of splendid ferocity almost sublime, from a malevolence rather mean than manly. At the last, struck suddenly, as he sees death upon him, from his pretence of defiant courage, he hurls down at a blow the whole structure of lies, and lays bare at once his own malignant cowardice and the innocence of his murdered wife :—is it with a touch of remorse, of saving penitence ?

> "Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,—
> I use up my last strength to strike once more
> Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
> To trample underfoot the whine and wile
> Of beast Violante,—and I grow one gorge
> To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
> Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
> A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
> No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
> But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
> How else lived that Athenian who died so,
> Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me ?
> I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
> Honest and bold : right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it 'Open' they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's,—no, I am the Pope's!
Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

The coward's agony of the fear of death has never been rendered in words so truthful or so terrible.

Last of all comes the Epilogue, entitled *The Book and the Ring*, giving an account of Count Guido's execution, in the form of contemporary letters, real and imaginary; with an extract from the Augustinian's sermon on Pompilia, and other documents needed to wind off the threads of the story.

The Ring and the Book was the first important work which Browning wrote after the death of his wife, and her memory holds in it a double shrine: at the opening an invocation, at the close a dedication. I quote the invocation: the words are sacred, and nothing remains to be said of them except that they are worthy of the dead and of the living.

"O lyric Love, half-angel and half-bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—

Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!"

18. Balaustion's Adventure: including a Transcript from Euripides.

[Published in August, 1871. Dedication: "To the Countess Cowper.—If I mention the simple truth: that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you,—who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements—I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent; for, how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be!—Euripides might fear little; but I, also, have an interest in the performance: and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your

feet?—R. B., London, July 23, 1871." (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XI. pp. 1-122).]

The episode which supplies the title of *Balaustion's Adventure* was suggested by the familiar story told by Plutarch in his life of Nicias: that after the ruin of the Sicilian expedition, those of the Athenian captives who could repeat any poetry of Euripides were set at liberty, or treated with consideration, by the Syracusans. In Browning's poem, Balaustion tells her four girl-friends the story of her "adventure" at Syracuse, where, shortly before, she had saved her own life and the lives of a ship's-company of her friends by reciting the play of *Alkestis* to the Euripides-loving townsfolk. After a brief reminiscence of the adventure, which has gained her (besides life, and much fame, and the regard of Euripides) a lover whom she is shortly to marry, she repeats, for her friends, the whole play, adding, as she speaks the words of Euripides, such other words of her own as may serve to explain or help to realise the conception of the poet. In other words, we have a transcript or re-telling in monologue of the whole play, interspersed with illustrative comments; and after this is completed Balaustion again takes up the tale, presents us with a new version of the story of Alkestis, refers by anticipation to a poem of Mrs. Browning and a picture of Sir Frederick Leighton, and ends exultantly:—

"And all came—glory of the golden verse,
And passion of the picture, and that fine
Frank outgush of the human gratitude
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse,—
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,

—It all came of the play which gained no prize!
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?"

It will thus be seen that the "Transcript from Euripides" is the real occasion of the poem, Balaustion's adventure, though graphically described, and even Balaustion herself, though beautifully and vividly brought before us, being of secondary importance. The "adventure," as it has been said, is the amber in which Browning has embalmed the *Alkestis*. The play itself is rendered in what is rather an interpretation than a translation; an interpretation conceived in the spirit of the motto taken from Mrs. Browning's *Wine of Cyprus*:—

"Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres."

Browning has no sympathy with those who impute to Euripides a sophistic rather than a pathetic intention; and it is conceivable that the "task" which Lady Cowper imposed upon him was to show, by some such method of translation and interpretation, the warm humanity, deep pathos, right construction and genuine truth to nature of the drama. With this end in view, Browning has woven the thread of the play into a sort of connected narrative, translating, with almost uniform literalness of language, the whole of the play as it was written by Euripides, but connecting it by comments, explanations, hints and suggestions; analyzing whatever may seem not easily to be apprehended, or not unlikely to be misapprehended; bringing out by a touch or a word some delicate shade of meaning, some subtle fine-

ness of idea or intention.[1] A more creative piece of criticism can hardly be found, not merely in poetry, but even in prose. Perhaps it shares in some degree the splendid fault of creative criticism by occasionally lending, not finding, the noble qualities which we are certainly made to see in the work itself.

The translation, though not literal in form, is literal in substance, and it is rendered into careful and expressive blank verse. Owing to the scheme on which it is constructed, the choruses could not be rendered into lyrical verse; while, for the same reason, a few passages here and there are omitted, or only indicated by a word or so in passing. The omitted passages are very few in number; but it is not always easy to see why they should have been omitted.[2] Browning's canon of translation is "to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language," and here, certainly, he has observed his rule. Notwithstanding the greater difficulty of the metrical form, and the far greater temptation to "brighten up" a version by the use of paraphrastic but sonorous effects, it is improbable that any prose translation could be more faithful. And not merely is Browning literal in the sense of following the original word for word, he gives the exact root-meaning of words which a literal translator would consider himself justified

[1] Note, for instance, the admirable exposition and defence of the famous and ill-famed altercation between Pheres and Admetos: one of the keenest bits of explanatory analysis in Mr. Browning's works. Or observe how beautifully human the dying Alkestis becomes as he interprets for her, and how splendid a humanity the jovial Herakles puts on.

[2] The two speeches of Eumelos, not without a note of pathos, are scarcely represented by—

"The children's tears ran fast
Bidding their father note the eye-lids' stare,
Hands'-droop, each dreadful circumstance of death."

in taking in their general sense. Occasionally a literality of this sort is less easily intelligible to the general reader than the more obvious word would have been; but, except in a very few instances, the whole translation is not less clear and forcible than it is exact. Whether or not the *Alkestis* of Browning is quite the *Alkestis* of Euripides, there is no doubt that this literal, yet glorified and vivified translation of a Greek play has added a new poem to English literature.

The blank verse of *Balaustion's Adventure* is somewhat different from that of its predecessor, *The Ring and the Book*: to my own ear, at least, it is by no means so original or so fine. It is indeed more restrained, but Browning seems to be himself working under a sort of restraint, or perhaps upon a theory of the sort of versification appropriate to classical themes. Something of frank vigour, something of flexibility and natural expressiveness, is lost, but, on the other hand, there is often a rich colour in the verse, a lingering perfume and sweetness in the melody, which has a new and delicate charm of its own.

19. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society.

[Published in December, 1871. (*Poetical Works*, Vol. XI. pp. 123-210).]

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau [1] is a blank verse monologue, supposed to be spoken, in a musing day-dream, by Louis Napoleon, while Emperor of the French, and calling himself, to the delight of ironical echoes, the

[1] The name *Hohenstiel-Schwangau* is formed from Hohen Schwangau, one of the castles of the late king of Bavaria.

"Saviour of Society." The work is equally distant in spirit from the branding satire and righteous wrath of Victor Hugo's *Châtiments* and *Napoléon le Petit*, and from Lord Beaconsfield's *couleur de rose* portrait, in *Endymion*, of the nominally pseudonymous Prince Florestan. It is neither a denunciation nor a eulogy, nor yet altogether an impartial delineation. It is an "apology," with much the same object as those of Bishop Blougram or Mr. Sludge, the Medium: "by no means to prove black white or white black, or to make the worse appear the better reason, but to bring a seeming monster and perplexing anomaly under the common laws of nature, by showing how it has grown to be what it is, and how it can with more or less of self-illusion reconcile itself to itself."[1]

The poem is very hard reading, perhaps as a whole the hardest intellectual exercise in Browning's work, but this arises not so much from the obscurity of its ideas and phrases as from the peculiar complexity of its structure. To apprehend it we must put ourselves at a certain standpoint, which is not easy to reach. The monologue as a whole represents, as we only learn at the end, not a direct speech to a real person in England, but a mere musing over a cigar in the palace in France. It is divided into two distinct sections, which need to be kept clearly apart in the mind. The first section, up to the line, more than half-way through, "Something like this the unwritten chapter reads," is a direct self-apology. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau puts forward what he represents as his theory of practice. It is founded on the principle of *laisser-faire*, and resolves itself into con-

[1] James Thomson on *The Ring and the Book*.

formity: concurrence with things as they are, with society as it is. He finds existing institutions, not indeed perfect, but sufficiently good for practical purposes; and he conceives his mission to be that of a builder on existing foundations, that of a social conservator, not of a social reformer: "to do the best with the least change possible." On his own showing, he has had this single aim in view from first to last, and on this ground, that of expediency, he explains and defends every act of his tortuous and vacillating policy. He has had his ambitions and ideals of giving freedom to Italy, for example, but he has set them aside in the interests of his own people and for what he holds to be their more immediate needs. So far the direct apology. He next proceeds to show what he might have done, but did not, the ideal course as it is held; commenting the while, as "Sagacity," upon the imaginary new version of his career. His comments represent his real conduct, and they are such as he assumes would naturally be made on the "ideal" course by the very critics who have censured his actual temporising policy. The final pages contain an involuntary confession that, even in his own eyes, Prince Hohenstiel is not quite satisfied with either his conduct or his defence of it.

To separate the truth from the falsehood in this dramatic monologue has not been Browning's intention, and it need not be ours. It may be repeated that Browning is no apologist for Louis Napoleon: he simply calls him to the front, and, standing aside, allows him to speak for himself.[1] In his speech under these circumstances we

[1] I find in a letter of Browning, which Mrs Orr has printed in her *Life and Letters of Browning* (1891), a reference to "what the editor of the

find just as much truth entangled with just as much sophistry as we might reasonably expect. Here, we get what seems the genuine truth ; there, in what appears to the speaker a satisfactory defence, we see that he is simply exposing his own moral defect ; again, like Bishop Blougram, he "says true things, but calls them by wrong names." Passages of the last kind are very frequent ; are, indeed, to be found everywhere throughout the poem ; and it is in these that Browning unites most cleverly the vicarious thinking due to his dramatic subject, and the good honest thought which we never fail to find dominant in his most exceptional work. The Prince gives utterance to a great deal of very true and very admirable good sense ; we are at liberty to think him insincere in his application of it, but an axiom remains true, even if it be wrongly applied.

The versification of the poem is everywhere vigorous, and often fine ; perhaps the finest passage it contains is that referring to Louis Napoleon's abortive dreams on behalf of Italy.

> "Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
> Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
> For ever ! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
> Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
> Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there
> Imparting exultation to the hills !
> Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk
> And waft my words above the grassy sea
> Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome—
> Hear ye not still—'Be Italy again ?'

Edinburgh calls my eulogium on the Second Empire—which it is not, any more than what another wiseacre affirms it to be—'a scandalous attack on the old constant friend of England'—it is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say for himself."

And ye, what strikes the panic to your heart?
Decrepit council-chambers,—where some lamp
Drives the unbroken black three paces off
From where the greybeards huddle in debate,
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
And what they think is fear, and what suspends
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch
Time disengages from the painted wall
Where Rafael moulderingly bids adieu,
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry
To dust, which a queen's finger traced of old;
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,
Of who once felt upon his head a hand
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot."

20. Fifine at the Fair.

[Published in 1872 (*Poetical Works*, Vol. XI. pp. 211-343).]

Fifine at the Fair is a monologue at once dramatic and philosophical. Its arguments, like those of *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, are part truth, part sophistry. The poem is prefaced by a motto from Molière's *Don Juan*, in which Donna Elvira suggests to her husband, with a bitter irony, the defence he ought to make for himself. Don Juan did not take the hint. Browning has done so. The genesis of the poem and the special form it has assumed are further explained by the following passage from Mrs. Orr:—

"Mr. Browning was, with his family, at Pornic, many years ago, and there saw the gypsy who is the original of Fifine. His fancy was evidently set roaming by her audacity, her strength—the contrast which she presented to the more spiritual types of womanhood; and this contrast eventually found expression in a poetic theory of life, in which these

M

opposite types and their corresponding modes of attraction became the necessary complement of each other. As he laid down the theory, Mr. Browning would be speaking in his own person. But he would turn into someone else in the act of working it out—for it insensibly carried with it a plea for yielding to those opposite attractions, not only successively, but at the same time; and a modified Don Juan would grow up under his pen."[1]

This modified Don Juan is the spokesman of the poem: not the "splendid devil" of Tirso de Molina, but a modern gentleman, living at Pornic, a refined, cultured, musical, artistic and philosophical person, "of high attainments, lofty aspirations, strong emotions, and capricious will." Strolling through the fair with his wife, he expatiates on the charm of a Bohemian existence, and, more particularly, on the charms of one Fifine, a rope-dancer, whose performance he has witnessed. Urged by the troubled look of his wife, he launches forth into an elaborate defence of inconstancy in love, and consequently of the character of his admiration for Fifine.

He starts by arguing:—

"That bodies show me minds,
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures,—
All by demonstrating the value of Fifine!"

He then applies his method to the whole of earthly life, finally resolving it into the principle:—

"All's change, but permanence as well.

. . . . . .

Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.

[1] *Handbook*, p. 148.

The individual soul works through the shows of sense,
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length 'God, man, or both together mixed.'"

Last of all, just as his speculations have come to an end in an earnest profession of entire love to his wife, and they pause for a moment on the threshold of the villa, he receives a note from Fifine.

"Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain—
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!"

He exceeds the allotted five minutes. Elvire takes him at his word; and, as we seem to be told in the epilogue, husband and wife are reconciled only in death.

Such is the barest outline of the structure and purport of the poem. But no outline can convey much notion of the wide range, profound significance and infinite ingenuity of the arguments; of the splendour and vigour of the poetry; or of the subtle consistency and exquisite truth of the character-painting. Small in amount as is this last in proportion to the philosophy, it is of very notable kind and quality. Not only the speaker, but Fifine, and still more Elvire, are quickened into life by graphic and delicate touches. If we except Lucrezia in *Andrea del Sarto*, in no other monologue is the presence and personality of the silent or seldom-speaking listener so vividly felt. We see the wronged wife Elvire, we know her, and we trace the very progress of her moods, the very changes in her face, as she listens to the fluent talk of her husband. Don Juan (if we may so call him)

is a distinct addition to Browning's portrait-gallery. Let no one suppose him to be a mere mouthpiece for dialectical disquisitions. He is this certainly, but his utterances are tinged with individual colour. This fact which, from the artistic point of view, is an inestimable advantage, is apt to prove, as in the case of Prince Hohenstiel, somewhat of a practical difficulty. "The clearest way of showing where he uses (1) Truth, (2) Sophism, (3) a mixture of both—is to say that wherever he speaks of Fifine (whether as type or not) in relation to himself and his own desire for truth, or right living with his wife, he is sophistical: wherever he speaks directly of his wife's value to him he speaks truth with an alloy of sophism; and wherever he speaks impersonally he speaks the truth.[1]" Keeping this in mind, we can easily separate the grain from the chaff; and the grain is emphatically worth storing. Perhaps no poem of Browning's contains so much deep and acute comment on life and conduct: few, such superabounding wealth of thought and imagery. Browning is famed for his elaborate and original similes; but I doubt if he has conceived any with more originality, or worked them out with richer elaboration, than those of the Swimmer, of the Carnival, of the Druid Monument, of Fifine herself. Nor has he often written more original poetry than some of the more passionate or imaginative passages of the poem. The following lines, describing an imaginary face representing Horror, have all the vivid sharpness of an actual vision or revelation:—

[1] J. T. Nettleship on "Fifine at the Fair" (*Browning Society's Papers*, Part II. p. 223). Mr. Nettleship's elaborate analysis of the poem is a most helpful and admirable piece of work.

"Observe how brow recedes,
Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp stare
Announces; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave; elate
Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend
All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end."

Just as good in a different style, is this quaint and quiet landscape:—

"For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you see,
The village-precinct; sun sets mild on Saint-Marie—
We only catch the spire, and yet I seem to know
What's hid i' the turn o' the hill: how all the graves must glow
Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss
Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow, crisp bead-blooms
Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, mid the tombs,
With prattle good as song, amuse the dead awhile,
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile."

The poem is written in Alexandrine couplets, and is, I believe, the only English poem of any length written in this metre since Drayton's *Polyolbion*. Browning's metre has scarcely the flexibility of the best French verse, but he allows himself occasionally two licenses not used in French since the time of Marot: (1) the addition of an unaccented syllable at the end of the first half of the verse, as:—

"'Twas not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!"—

(2) the addition of two syllables, making seven instead of six beats.

"What good were else i' the drum and fife? O pleasant
land of France!"

21. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country; or, Turf and Towers.

[Published in 1873 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol XII. pp. 1-177).]

Red Cotton Night-Cap Country is a story of real life, true in all its facts, and studied at the place where it had occurred a few years before: St. Aubin, in Normandy (the St. Rambert of the poem). It is the story of the life of Antoine Mellerio, the Paris jeweller, whose tragic death occurred at St. Aubin on the 13th April 1870. A suit concerning his will, decided only in the summer of 1872, supplied Browning with the materials of his tragedy. In the first proof of the poem the real names of persons and places were given; but they were changed before publication, and are now in every case fictitious. The second edition of Mrs. Orr's *Handbook* contains a list of the real names, which I subjoin.[1]

[1] "Page 2. *The Firm Miranda*—Mellerio Brothers. Page 4. *St. Rambert*—St Aubin; *Joyeux*, *Joyous Gard*—Lion, Lionesse. Page 6. *Vire*—Caen. Page 25. *St. Rambertese*—St. Aubinese. Page 29. *Londres*—Douvres; *London*—Dover; *La Roche*—Courcelle; *Monlieu*—Bernières; *Villeneuve*—Langrune; *Pons*—Luc; *La Ravissante*—La Délivrande. Page 33. *Raimbaux*—Bayeux. Page 34. *Morillon*—Hugonin; *Mirecourt*—Bonnechose; *Miranda*—Mellerio. Page 35. *New York*—Madrid. Page 41. *Clairvaux*—Tailleville. Page 42. *Madrilene*—Turinese. Page 43. *Gonthier*—Bény; *Rousseau*—Voltaire; *Léonce*—Antoine. Page 52. *Of "Firm Miranda, London and New York"*—"Mellerio Brothers"—Meller, people say. Page 79. *Rare Vissante*—Del Yvrande; *Aldabert*—Regnobert. Page 80. *Eldobert*—Ragnebert; *Mailleville*—Beaudoin. Page 81. *Chaumont*—Quelen; *Vert-galant*—Talleyrand. Page 89. *Ravissantish*—Délivrandish. Page 101. *Clara de Millefleurs*—Anna de Beaupré; *Coliseum Street*—Miromesnil Street.

The book is dedicated to Miss Thackeray (Mrs. Richmond Ritchie), and the whole story is supposed to be told to her (as in substance it was) by Browning, who has thus given to the poem a tone of pleasant colloquialism. Told as it is, it becomes in part a dramatic monologue of which the *dramatis persona* is Robert Browning. It is full of quiet, sometimes grim, humour; of picturesque and witty touches; of pungency and irony. Its manner, the humorous telling of a tragic tale, is a little after the pattern of Carlyle. In such a setting the tragic episodes, sometimes all but heroic, sometimes almost grotesque, have all the impressiveness of contrast.

The story itself, in the main, is a sordid enough tragedy: like several of Browning's later books, it is a study in evil. The two characters who fill the stage of this little history are tragic comedians; they, too, are "real creatures, exquisitely fantastical, strangely exposed to the world by a lurid catastrophe, who teach us that fiction, if it can imagine events and persons more agreeable to the taste it has educated, can read us no such furrowing lesson in life." The character of Miranda, the sinner who would reconcile sin with salvation, is drawn with special subtlety; analysed, dissected rather, with the unerring scalpel of the experienced operator.

Page 110. *Steiner*—Mayer; *Commercy*—Larocy; *Sierck*—Metz. Page 111. *Muhlhausen*—Debacker. Page 112. *Carlino Centofanti*—Miranda di Mongino. Page 121. *Portugal*—Italy. Page 125. "*Gustave*"—"Alfred." Page 135. *Vaillant*—Mériel. Page 149. *Thirty-three*—Twenty-five. 152. *Beaumont*—Pasquier. Page 167. *Sceaux*—Garges. Page 203. *Luc de la Maison Rouge*—Jean de la Becquetière; *Claise*—Vire; *Maude*—Anne. Page 204. *Dionysius*—Eliezer; *Scolastica*—Elizabeth. Page 214. *Twentieth*—Thirteenth. Page 241. *Fricquot*—Picot."—Mrs. Orr's *Handbook*, Second Edition, pp. 261-2.

Miranda is swayed through life by two opposing tendencies, for he is of mixed Castilian and French blood. He is mastered at once by two passions, earthly and religious, illicit love and Catholic devotion: he cannot let go the one and he will not let go the other; he would enjoy himself on the "Turf" without abandoning the shelter of the "Towers." His life is spent in trying to effect a compromise between the two antagonistic powers which finally pull down his house of life. Clara, his mistress-wife, is a mirror of himself; she humours him, manages him, perhaps on his own lines of inclination.

"'But—loved him?' Friend, I do not praise her love!
True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.
'Worship not me, but God!' the angels urge!"

This man and woman are analysed with exquisite skill; but they are not in the strict sense inventions, creations: we understand rather than see them. Only towards the end, where the facts leave freer play for the poetic impulse, do they rise into sharp vividness of dramatic life and speech. Nothing in the poem equals in intensity the great soliloquy of Miranda before his strange and suicidal leap, and the speech of Clara to the "Cousinry." Here we pass at a bound from chronicling to creation. As a narrative, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* has all the interest of a novel, with the concentration and higher pitch of poetry. Less ingenious and philosophical than *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and *Fifine at the Fair*, it is far more intimately human, more closely

concerned with "man's thoughts and loves and hates," with the manifestations of his eager and uneasy spirit, in strange shapes, on miry roads, in dubious twilights. Of all Browning's works it is perhaps the easiest to read; no tale could be more straightforward, no language more lucid, no verse more free from harshness or irregularity, The versification, indeed, is exceptionally smooth and measured, seldom rising into strong passion, but never running into volubility. Here and there are short passages, which I can scarcely detach for quotation, with a singular charm of vague remote music. The final summary of Clara and Miranda, excellent and convenient alike, may be severed without much damage from the context.

> "Clara, I hold the happier specimen,—
> It may be, through that artist-preference
> For work complete, inferiorly proposed,
> To incompletion, though it aim aright.
> Morally, no! Aspire, break bounds! I say,
> Endeavour to be good, and better still,
> And best! Success is nought, endeavour's all.
> But intellect adjusts the means to ends,
> Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least;
> No prejudice to high thing, intellect
> Would do and will do, only give the means.
> Miranda, in my picture-gallery,
> Presents a Blake; be Clara—Meissonnier!
> Merely considered so, by artist, mind!
> For, break through Art and rise to poetry,
> Bring Art to tremble nearer, touch enough
> The verge of vastness to inform our soul
> What orb makes transit through the dark above,
> And there's the triumph!—there the incomplete,
> More than completion, matches the immense,—
> Then, Michelagnolo against the world!"

22. ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY : including a Transcript from Euripides ; being the Last Adventure of Balaustion.

[Published in April, 1875. (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XIII. pp. 1-258).]

Aristophanes' Apology, as its sub-title indicates, is a kind of sequel to *Balaustion's Adventure*. It is the record, in Balaustion's words, of an adventure which happened to her after her marriage with Euthukles. On the day when the news of Euripides' death reached Athens, as Balaustion and her husband were sitting at home, toward nightfall, Aristophanes, coming home with his revellers from the banquet which followed his triumph in the play of *Thesmophoriazousai*, burst in upon them.

"There stood in person Aristophanes.
And no ignoble presence ! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—
True, the veins swelled, blue net-work, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple, then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—
Was never nursed by temperance or health.
But huge the eyeballs rolled black native fire,
Imperiously triumphant : nostrils wide
Waited their incense ; while the pursed mouth's pout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence—
I thought,—such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic : drunk, perhaps,
But that's religion ; sense too plainly snuffed :
Still, sensuality was grown a rite."

He, too, has just heard of Euripides' death, and an impulse, part sympathy, part mockery, has brought him to the "house friendly to Euripides." The revellers retire abashed before Balaustion; he alone remains. From the extraordinary and only too natural gabble and garbage of his opening words, he quickly passes to a more or less serious explanation and defence of his conduct toward the dead poet; to an exposition, in fact, of his aims and doings as a writer of comedy. When his "apology" is ended, Balaustion replies, censuring him pretty severely, making adroit use of the licence of a "stranger" and a woman, and defending Euripides against him. For a further (and the best) defence, she reads the whole of the *Herakles*, which Browning here translates. Aristophanes, naturally, is not convinced; impressed he must have been, to have borne so long a reading without demur: he flings them a snatch of song, finding in his impromptu a hint for a new play, the *Frogs*, and is gone. And now, a year after, as the couple return to Rhodes from a disgraced and dismantled Athens, Balaustion dictates to Euthukles her recollection of the "adventure," for the double purpose of putting the past events on record, and of eluding the urgency of the present sorrow.

It will thus be seen that the book consists of two distinct parts. There is, first, the apology of Aristophanes, second, the translation of the play of Euripides. *Herakles*, or, as it is more generally known, *Hercules Furens*, is rendered completely and consecutively, in blank verse and varied choric measures. It is not, as was the case with *Alkestis*, worked into the body of the poem; not welded, but inserted. We have thus, while losing the

commentary, the advantage of a detached transcript, with a lyrical rendering of the lyrical parts of the play. These are given with a constant vigour and closeness, often with a rare beauty (as in the famous "Ode bewailing Age," and that other on the labours of Herakles). Precisely the same characteristics that we have found in the translation of the *Alkestis* are here again to be found, and all that I said on the former, considered apart from its setting, may be applied to the latter. We have the same literalness (again with a few apparent exceptions), the same insistence on the root-meaning of words, the same graphic force and vivifying touch, the same general clearness and charm.

The original part of the book is of far closer texture and more remarkable order than "the amber which embalms *Alkestis*," the first adventure of Balaustion ; but it has less human emotion, less general appeal. It is nothing less than a resuscitation of the old controversy between Aristophanes and Euripides; a resuscitation, not only of the controversy, but of the combatants. "Local colour" is laid on with an unsparing hand, though it cannot be said that the atmosphere is really Greek. There is hardly a line, there is never a page, without an allusion to some recondite thing : Athenian customs, Greek names, the plays of Euripides, above all, the plays of Aristophanes. "Every line of the poem," it has been truly said, "shows Mr. Browning as soaked and steeped in the comedies as was Bunyan in his Bible." The result is a vast, shapeless thing, splendidly and grotesquely alive, but alive with the obscure and tangled life of the jungle.

Browning's attitude towards the controversy, the side

he takes as champion of Euripides, is distinctly shown, not merely in Balaustion's statement and defence, but in the whole conduct of the piece. Aristophanes, though on his own defence, is set in a decidedly unfavourable light; and no one, judging from Browning's work, can doubt as to his opinion of the relative qualities of the two great poets. It is possible even to say there is a partiality in the presentment. But it must be remembered on the other hand that Browning is not concerned simply with the question of art, but with the whole bearings, artistic and ethical, of the contest; and it must be remembered that the aim of Comedy is intrinsically lower and more limited than that of Tragedy, that it is destructive, disintegrating, negative, concerned with smaller issues and more temporary questions; and that Euripides may reasonably be held a better teacher, a keener, above all a more helpful, reader of the riddle of life, than his mighty assailant. This is how Aristophanes has been described, by one who should know:—

"He is an aggregate of many men, all of a certain greatness. We may build up a conception of his powers if we mount Rabelais upon Hudibras, lift him with the songfulness of Shelley, give him a vein of Heinrich Heine, and cover him with the mantle of the Anti-Jacobin, adding (that there may be some Irish in him) a dash of Grattan, before he is in motion."[1]

Now the "Titanic pamphleteer" is more recognisable in Browning's most vivid portrait than the "lyric poet of aerial delicacy" who in some strange fashion, beyond his own wildest metamorphoses, distracted and idealised the otherwise congruous figure. Not that this is over-

[1] George Meredith, *On the Idea of Comedy.*

looked or forgotten: it is brought out admirably in several places, notably in the fine song put into the mouth of Aristophanes at the close; but it is scarcely so prominent as lovers of him could desire. It is possible, too, that Browning somewhat over-accentuates his earnestness; not his fundamental earnestness, but the extent to which he remembered and exhibited it. "My soul bade fight": yes, but "laugh," too, and laugh for laughter's as well as fight for principle's sake. This, again, is merely a matter of detail, of shading. There can be little doubt that the whole general outline of the man is right, none whatever that it is a living and breathing outline. His apology is presented in Browning's familiar manner of genuine feeling tempered with sophistry. As a piece of dramatic art it is worthy to stand beside his famous earlier apologies; and it has value too as a contribution to criticism, to a vital knowledge of the Attic drama and the work and personality of Aristophanes and Euripides, and to a better understanding of the drama as a criticism of life.

23. The Inn Album.

[Published in November, 1875. (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol XII. pp. 179-311.) Translated into German in 1877: "*Das Fremdenbuch* von Robert Browning. Aus dem Englischen von E. Leo. Hamburg: W. Mauke Söhne."]

The story of *The Inn Album* is founded on fact, though it is not, like *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, an almost literal transcript from life. The characters of the poem are four, all unnamed: a young, "polished snob," an im-

poverished middle-aged nobleman, a woman, whom he had seduced, and who is now married to a clergyman; and a young girl, her friend, who is betrothed to the younger of the two men. Of these characters, the only one whom Browning has invented is the girl, through whom, in his telling of the story, the tragedy is brought about. But he has softened the repulsiveness of the original tale, and has also brought it to a ringing close, not supplied by the bare facts. The career of the elder man, which came to an end in 1839, did not by any means terminate with the events recorded in the poem.

The Inn Album is a story of wrecked lives, lost hopes, of sordid and gloomy villainies; with only light enough in its darkness to make that darkness visible. It is profoundly sad; yet

> "These things are life:
> And life, they say, is worthy of the Muse."

It would also be profoundly depressing but for the art which has wrung a grandeur out of grime, which has uplifted a story of mere vulgar evil to the height of tragedy. Out of materials that might be melodramatic, Browning has created a drama of humanity of which the impression is single, intense and overpowering. Notwithstanding the clash of physical catastrophe at the close, it is really a spiritual tragedy; and in it Browning has achieved that highest of achievements: the right, vivid and convincing presentment of human nature at its highest and lowest, at its extremes of possible action and emotion. It is not perfect: the colloquialism which truth and art alike demand sinks sometimes, though not

in the great scenes, to the confines of a bastard realism. But in the main the poem is an excellent example of the higher imaginative realism, of the close, yet poetic or creative, treatment of life.

The four characters who play out the brief and fateful action of this drama in narrative (the poem is more nearly related in form to the pure drama than any other of Browning's poems not cast in the dramatic form) are creations, three of them at least, in a deeper sense than the characters in *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, or than the character in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*. The "good gay girl," serving her unconscious purpose in the tragic action, is properly enough a mere sketch; but the two men and the elder woman are profoundly studied characters, struck into life and revealed to themselves, to one another and to us, at the supreme moment of a complex crisis. The elder man is one of Browning's most finished studies, and, morally, one of the worst characters even he has ever investigated. He is at once bad, clever and cynical, the combination, of all others, most noxious and most hopeless. He prides himself above all things on his intellect; and it is evident that he has had the power to shape his course and to sway others. But now, at fifty, he knows himself to be a failure. The cause of it he traces mainly to a certain crisis of his life, when he won, only to abuse, the affections of a splendidly beautiful woman, whose equal splendour of soul he saw only when too late. It is significant of him that he never views his conduct as a crime, a wrong to the woman, but as a mistake on his part; and his attitude is not that of remorse, but of one who has missed a chance. When, after four years, he meets unexpectedly the woman whom

he has wronged and lost, the good and evil in him blaze out in a sudden and single flame of earnest appeal. In the fact that this passionate appeal should be only half-sincere, or, if sincere, then only for the moment, that to her who hears it, it should seem wholly insincere, lies the intensity of the situation.

The character of the woman is less complex but not less consistent and convincing. Like the man, her development has been arrested and distorted by the cause which has made him too a wreck. Her love was single-hearted and over-mastering ; its very force, in recoil, turned it into hate. Yoked to a soulless husband, whom she has married half in pity, half in despair, her whole nature has frozen ; so that when we see her she is, while physically the same, spiritually the ghost of her former self. The subtlety of the picture is to show what she is now while making equally plain what she was in the past. She is a figure not so much pathetic as terrible.

Pathetic, despite its outer comedy, is the figure of the young man, the great rough, foolish, rich youth, tutored in evil by his Mephistopheles, but only, we fancy, skin-deep in it, slow of thought but quick of feeling, with his one and only love, never forgotten, and now found again in the very woman whom his "friend" has wronged. His last speech, with its clumsy yet genuine chivalry, its touching, broken words, its fine feeling and faltering expression, is one of the most pathetic things I know. Such a character, in its very absence of subtlety, is a triumph of Browning's, to whom intellectual simplicity must be the hardest of all dramatic assumptions.

24. Pacchiarotto, and how he worked in Distemper: with other poems.

[Published in July, 1876 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XIV. pp. 1-152).]

Pacchiarotto and other Poems is the first collection of miscellaneous pieces since the *Dramatis Personæ* of 1864. It is somewhat of an exception to the general rule of Browning's work. A large proportion of it is critical rather than creative, a criticism of critics; perhaps it would be at once more correct and concise to call it "Robert Browning's Apology." *Pacchiarotto*, *At the "Mermaid*," *House*, *Shop* and *Epilogue*, are all more or less personal utterances on art and the artist, sometimes in a concrete and impersonal way, more often in a somewhat combative and contemptuous spirit. The most important part of the volume, however, is that which contains the two or three monodramatic poems and the splendid ballad of the fleet, *Hervé Riel.*

The first and longest poem, *Of Pacchiarotto, and how he worked in Distemper*, divides itself into two parts, the first being the humorous rendering of a true anecdote told in Vasari, of Giacomo Pacchiarotto, a Sienese painter of the sixteenth century; and the second, a still more mirthful onslaught of the poet upon his critics. The story—

"Begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle,"—

is funny enough in itself, and it points an excellent moral; but it is chiefly interesting as a whimsical freak of verse, an extravaganza in staccato. The rhyming is

of its kind almost incomparable as a sustained effort in double and triple grotesque rhymes. Not even in *Hudibras*, not even in *Don Juan*, is there anything like them. I think all other experiments of the kind, however successful as a whole, let you see now and then that the author has had a hard piece of work to keep up his appearance of ease. In *Pacchiarotto* there is no evidence of the strain. The masque of critics, under the cunning disguise of May-day chimney-sweepers :—

"'We critics as sweeps out your chimbly !
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir !
Who spares coal in kitchen an't you, sir !
And neighbours complain it's no joke, sir !
You ought to consume your own smoke, sir !'"—

this after-part, overflowing with jolly humour and comic scorn, a besom wielded by a laughing giant, is calculated to put the victims in better humour with their executioner than with themselves. Browning has had to endure more than most men at the hands of the critics, and he takes in this volume, not in this poem only, a full and a characteristically good-humoured revenge. The *Epilogue* follows up the pendant to *Pacchiarotto*. There is the same jolly humour, the same combative self-assertiveness, the same retort *Tu quoque*, with a yet more earnest and pungent enforcement.

"Wine, pulse in might from me !
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began—
God's gift to gladden the heart of man ;
But spirit's at proof, I promise that !
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage—wine for me.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
  Earth is my vineyard, these grow there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who set it—his praise be my reward!
  Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's
Let them 'lay, pray, bray'[1]—the addle-pates!
  Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!"

Despite its humorous expression, the view of poetic art contained in these verses is both serious and significant. It is a frank (if defiant) confession of faith.

At the "Mermaid," a poem of characteristic energy and directness, is a protest against the supposition or assumption that the personality and personal views and opinions of a poet are necessarily reflected in his dramatic work. It protests, at the same time, against the sham melancholy and pseudo-despair which Byron made fashionable in poetry:—

"Have you found your life distasteful?
  My life did and does smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
  Mine I saved and hold complete.

Do your joys with age diminish?
  When mine fail me, I'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
  My sun sets to rise again.

. . . . . .

I find earth not gray but rosy,
  Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
  Do I stand and stare? All's blue."

[1] The jocose vindictiveness with which Browning returns again and again to the assault of the bad grammar and worse rhetoric of Byron's once so much belauded address to the ocean is very amusing. The above is only one out of four or five instances.

House confirms or continues the primary contention in *At the "Mermaid"*: this time by the image of a House of Life, which some poets may choose to set on view: "for a ticket apply to the Publisher." Browning not merely denounces but denies the so-called self-revelations of poets. He answers Wordsworth's

> "With this same key
> Shakespeare unlocked his heart,"

by the characteristic retort:—

> "Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!"

In *Shop* we have another keen piece of criticism: a protest against poets who make their shop their home, and their song mere ware for sale.

After the personal and critical section we pass to half-a-dozen lyrics: *Fears and Scruples*, a covert and startling poem, a doctrine embodied in a character; then two beautiful little *Pisgah-Sights*, a dainty experiment in metre, and in substance the expression of Browning's favourite lesson, the worth of earth and the need of the mystery of life; *Appearances*, a couple of stanzas whose telling simplicity recalls the lovely earlier lilt, *Misconceptions; Natural Magic* and *Magical Nature*, two magical snatches, as perfect as the "first fine careless rapture" of the earlier lyrics. I quote the latter:—

"MAGICAL NATURE.

I.

Flower—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
  Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
  Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

2.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!"

But the finest lyric in the volume is *St. Martin's Summer*, a poem fantastically tragic, hauntingly melodious, mysterious and chilling as the ghostly visitants at late love's pleasure-bower of whom it sings. I do not think Browning has written many lyrical poems of more brilliant and original quality. *Bifurcation*, as its name denotes, is a study of divided paths in life, the paths of Love and Duty chosen severally by two lovers whose epitaphs Browning gives. The moral problem, which is sinner, which is saint, is stated and left open. The poem is an etching, sharp, concise and suggestive. *Numpholeptos* (nymph-entranced) has all the mystery, the vague charm, the lovely sadness, of a picture of Burne Jones. Its delicately fantastic colouring, its dreamy passion, and the sad and quiet sweetness of its verse, have some affinity with *St. Martin's Summer*, but are unlike anything else in Browning. It is the utterance of a hopeless-hoping and pathetically resigned love: the love of a merely human man for an angelically pure and unhumanly cold woman, who requires in him an unattainable union of immaculate purity and complete experience of life.

"Still you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam smile has past

> The pallid limit and, transformed at last,
> Lies, sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
> It sweetens, softens!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> What means the sad slow silver smile above
> My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
> But acquiescence that I take my rest,
> Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
> The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
> Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
> —Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
> By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
> Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such the boon
> I beg? Nay, dear . . .
> Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!"

The action of this soul's tragedy takes place under "the light that never was on sea or land": it is the tragedy of a soul, but of a disembodied soul.

A Forgiveness is a drama of this world. It is the legitimate successor of the monologues of *Men and Women;* it may, indeed, be most precisely compared with an earlier monologue, *My Last Duchess;* and it is, like these, the concentrated essence of a complete tragedy. Like all the best of Browning's poems, it is thrown into a striking situation, and developed from this central point. It is the story of a love merged in contempt, quenched in hate, and rekindled in a fatal forgiveness, told in confession to a monk by the man whom the monk has wronged. The personage who speaks is one of the most sharply-outlined characters in Browning: a clear, cold, strong-willed man, implacable in love or hate. He tells his story in a quiet, measured, utterly unemotional manner, with reflective interruptions and explanations, the acute analysis of

a merciless intellect; leading gradually up to a crisis only to be matched by the very finest crises in Browning:—

"Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!"

The poem is by far the greatest thing in the volume; it is, indeed, one of the very finest examples of Browning's psychological subtlety and concentrated dramatic power.[1]

The ballad of *Hervé Riel* which has no rival but Tennyson's *Revenge* among modern sea-ballads, was written at Croisic, 30th September 1867, and was published in the *Cornhill Magazine* for March, 1871 in, order that the £100 which had been offered for it might be sent to the Paris Relief Fund. It may be named, with the "Ride from Ghent to Aix," as a proof of how simply and graphically Browning can write if he likes; how promptly he can stir the blood and thrill the heart. The facts of the story, telling how, after the battle of the Hogue, a simple Croisic sailor saved all that was left of tbe French fleet by guiding the vessels into the

[1] It is worth comparing *A Forgiveness* with a poem of very similar motive by Leconte de Lisle: *Le Jugement de Komor* (*Poèmes Barbares*). Each is a fine example of its author, in just those qualities for which both poets are eminent: originality and subtlety of subject, pregnant picturesqueness of phrase and situation, and grimly tragic power. The contrast no less than the likeness which exists between them will be evident on a comparison of the two poems.

harbour, are given in the Croisic guide-books; and Browning has followed them in everything but the very effective end:—

"'Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!'
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more."

"Ce brave homme," says the account, "ne demanda pour récompense d'un service aussi signalé, qu'un *conge absolu* pour rejoindre sa femme, qu'il nomma la Belle Aurore."

Cenciaja, the only blank verse piece in the volume, is of the nature of a note or appendix to Shelley's "superb achievement" *The Cenci*. It serves to explain the allusion to the case of Paolo Santa Croce (*Cenci*, Act V. sc. iv.). Browning obtained the facts from a MS. volume of memorials of Italian crime, in the possession of Sir John Simeon, who published it in the series of the Philobiblon Society.[1]

Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial, a grotesque and humorously-told "reminiscence of A.D. 1670," is, up to stanza 35, the versification of an anecdote recorded by Baldinucci, the artist and art critic (1624—1696), in his History of Painters. The incident with which it concludes is imaginary.

[1] In reference to the title *Cenciaja*, and the Italian proverb which follows it, *Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato*, Browning stated, in a letter to Mr. H. B. Forman (printed in his *Shelley*, 1880, ii. 419), that "'aia' is generally an accumulative yet depreciative termination: 'Cenciaja'—a bundle of rags—a trifle. The proverb means, 'Every poor creature will be pressing into the company of his betters,' and I used it to deprecate the notion that I intended anything of the kind."

25. The Agamemnon of Æschylus.

[Published in October, 1877 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XIII. pp. 259-357).]

Browning prefaces his transcript of the *Agamemnon* with a brief introduction, in which he thus sets forth his theory of translation :—

"If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear : while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments, anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, 'to gape for Æschylus and get Theognis.' I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—πόνος, or μέγας, or τέλος, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines. . . . Further,—if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek ; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus."

Every condition here laid down has been carried out with unflinching courage. Browning has rendered word by word and line by line ; with, indeed, some

slight inevitable expansion in the rhymed choruses, very slight, infinitely slighter than every other translator has found needful. Throughout, there are numberless instances of minute and happy accuracy of phrase, re-creations of the very thoughts of Æschylus. An incomparable dexterity is shown in fitting phrase upon phrase, forcing line to bear the exact weight of line, rendering detail by detail. But for this very reason, as a consequence of this very virtue, there is no denying that Browning's version is certainly "very hard reading," so hard reading that it is sometimes necessary to turn to the Greek in order to fully understand the English. Browning has anticipated, but not altogether answered, this objection. For, besides those passages which in their fidelity to every "minute particular," simply reproduce the obscurity of the original, there is much that seems either obscure or harsh, and is so simply because it gives "the turn of each phrase," not merely "in as Greek a fashion as English will bear," but beyond it: phrases which are native to Greek, foreign to English. The choruses, which are attempted in metre as close as English can come to Greek metre, suggest the force, but not the dignity of the original; and seem often to be content to drop much of the poem by the way in getting at "the ideas of the poet." It is a Titan's version of an Olympian, and it is thus no doubt the scholar rather than the general reader who will find most to please him in "this attempt to give our language the similitude of Greek by close and sustained grappling, word to word, with so sublime and difficult a masterpiece." [1]

[1] J. A. Symonds, *Academy*, Nov. 10, 1877.

26. La Saisiaz: The Two Poets of Croisic.

[Published in May, 1878. *La Saisiaz* (written November, 1877, pp. 1-82; *The Two Poets of Croisic*, pp. 83-201. (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XIV. pp. 153-204, 205-279).]

In *La Saisiaz* Browning reasons of God and the soul, of life here and of life to come. The poem is addressed to a friend of old date, who died suddenly while she was staying with Browning and his sister, in the summer of 1877, at a villa called La Saisiaz (The Sun) in the mountains near Geneva. The first twenty pages tell the touching story; the rest of the poem records the argument which it called forth. "Was ending ending once and always, when you died?" Browning asks himself, and he attempts to answer the question, not on traditional grounds, or on the authority of a creed, but by honest reasoning. He assumes two postulates, and two only, that God exists and that the soul exists; and he proceeds to show, very forcibly, the unsatisfactory nature of life if consciousness ends with death, and its completely satisfactory nature if the soul's existence continues.

"Without the want,
Life, now human, would be brutish: just that hope, however scant,
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope therein away,
All we have to do is surely not endure another day.
This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that promise joy: life done—
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete fulfilment? none.

'But the soul is not the body': and the breath is not the flute;
Both together make the music: either marred and all is mute."

This hypothesis is purely personal, and as such he holds it. But, to his own mind at least, he finds that

"Sorrow did and joy did nowise,—life well weighed—preponderate.
By necessity ordained thus? I shall bear as best I can;
By a cause all-good, all-wise, all-potent? No, as I am man!"

Yet, if only the assumption of a future life may be made, he will thankfully acquiesce in an earthly failure, which will then be only relative, and the earnest of a heavenly gain. Having arrived at this point, Browning proceeds to argue out the question yet further, under the form of a dialogue between "Fancy" (or the soul's instinct) and "Reason." He here shows that not merely is life explicable only as a probation, but that probation is only possible under our present conditions, in our present uncertainty. If it were made certain that there is a future life in which we shall be punished or rewarded, according as we do evil or good, we should have no choice of action, hence no virtue in doing what were so manifestly to our own advantage. Again, if we were made certain of this future life of higher faculties and greater happiness, should we hesitate to rush to it at the first touch of sorrow, before our time? He ends, therefore, with a "hope—no more than hope, but hope—no less than hope," which amounts practically to the assurance that, as he puts it in the last line—

"He at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God!"

The Two Poets of Croisic is a comedy in narrative, dealing mainly with the true tale of Paul Desforges-Maillard, whose story furnished Piron with the matter of his *Métromanie*. The first of the "two poets" is one René Gentilhomme, born 1610, once page to the Prince of Condé, afterwards court-poet to Louis XIII. His story, by an easy transition, leads into the richer record of Desforges, which Browning gives with not a few variations, evidently intentional, from the facts of the case. Paul-Briand Maillard, self-surnamed Desforges, was born at Croisic, April 24, 1699 : he died at the age of seventy-three. His memory has survived that of better poets on account of the famous hoax which he played on the Paris of his day, including no less a person than Voltaire. The first part of the story is told pretty literally in Browning's pages :—how Desforges, unsuccessful as a poet in his own person, assumed the title of a woman, and as Mlle. Malcrais de la Vigne (his verses being copied by an obliging cousin, Mme. Mondoret) obtained an immediate and astonishing reputation. The sequel is somewhat altered. Voltaire's revenge when the cheat was discovered, so far from being prompt and immediate, was treacherously dissimulated, and its accomplishment deferred for more than one long-subsequent occasion. Desforges lived to have the last word, in assisting at the first representation of Piron's *Métromanie*, in which Voltaire's humiliation and the Croisic poet's clever trick are perpetuated for as long as that sprightly and popular comedy shall be remembered.

In his graphic and condensed version of the tale, Browning has used a poet's licence to heighten the effect and increase the piquancy of the narrative. The poem

is written in *ottava rima*, but, very singularly, there is not one double rhyme from beginning to end. It is difficult to see why Browning, a finer master of grotesque compound rhymes than Byron, should have so carefully avoided them in a metre which, as in Byron's hands, owes no little of its effect to a clever introduction of such rhymes. The lines (again of set purpose, it is evident) overlap one another without an end-pause where in Italian it is almost universal, namely, after the sixth line. The result of the innovation is far from successful: it destroys the flow of the verse and gives it an air of abruptness. Of the liveliness, vivacity and pungency of the tale, no idea can be given by quotation: two of the stanzas in which the moral is enforced, the two finest, perhaps, in the poem, are, however, severable from their context:—

"Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
  Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
Of all comprised within our actual scope
  Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
  Henceforward among groundlings? That's offence
Just as indubitably: stars abound
O'erhead, but then—what flowers made glad the ground!

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
  What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
  Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the steer
Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
  Despair: but ever 'mid the whirling fear,
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!"

The poem is followed by an exquisite Epilogue, one

of the most delicately graceful and witty and tender of Browning's lyrics. The briefer Prologue is not less beautiful :—

"Such a starved bank of moss
Till, that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across :
Violets were born !

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud :
Splendid, a star !

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out :
That was thy face !"

27. Dramatic Idyls.

[Published in May 1879 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XV. pp. 1-80).]

In the *Dramatic Idyls* Browning may almost be said to have broken new ground. His idyls are short poems of passionate action, presenting in a graphic and concentrated way a single episode or tragic crisis. Not only by their concreteness and popular effectiveness, their extraordinary vigour of conception and expression, are they distinguished from much of Browning's later writing : they have in addition this significant novelty of interest, that here for the first time Browning has found subjects for his poetry among the poor, that here for the first time he has painted, with all his close and imaginative realism, the human comedy of the lower classes. That he has

never done so before, though rather surprising, comes, I suppose, from his preponderating interest in intellectual problems, and from the difficulty of finding such among what Léon Cladel has called *tragiques histoires plébéiennes*. But the happy instinct has at last come to him, and we are permitted to watch the humours of that delicious pair of sinners saved, "Publican Black Ned Bratts and Tabby his big wife too," as a relief to the less pleasant and profitable spectacle of His Majesty Napoleon III., or of even the two poets of Croisic. All the poems in the volume (with the exception of a notable and noble protest against vivisection, in the form of a touching little true tale of a dog) are connected together by a single motive, on which every poem plays a new variation. The motto of the book might be:—

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men,
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of his life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

This idea of a turning-point or testing-time in the lives of men is more or less expressed or implied in very much of Browning's poetry, but nowhere is it expressed so completely, so concisely, or so consecutively, as here. In *Martin Relph* (which "embodies," says Mrs. Orr, "a vague remembrance of something read by Mr. Browning when he was himself a boy") we have an instance of the tide "omitted," and a terrible picture of the remorse which follows. Martin Relph has the chance presented to him of saving two lives, that of the girl he loves and of his rival whom she loves. The chance is but of an instant's duration. He hesitates, and the moment is for ever lost. In that one moment his true soul, with its

instinctive selfishness, has leapt to light, and the knowledge of it torments him with an inextinguishable agony. In *Ivàn Ivânovitch* (founded on a popular Russian story of a woman throwing her children to the wolves to save her own life) we have a twofold illustration of the theme. The testing-moment comes to the mother, Loùscha, and again to Ivàn Ivànovitch. While the woman fails terribly in her duty, and meets a terrible reward, the man rises to a strange and awful nobility of action, and "acts for God." *Halbert and Hob*, a grim little tragedy (suggested by a passage in the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle), presents us with the same idea in a singularly concrete form. The crisis has a saving effect, but it is an incomplete, an unwilling or irresistible, act of grace, and it bears but sorry fruit. In *Ned Bratts* (suggested by the story of "Old Tod," in Bunyan's *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*[1]) we have a prompt and quite hurried taking of the tide: the sudden conversion, repentance, and expiation of the "worst couple, rogue and quean, unhanged." *Pheidippides* (the legend of the runner who brought the news of Marathon to Athens, and died in

[1] "At a summer Assizes holden at *Hartfort*, while the Judge was sitting upon the Bench, comes this old *Tod* into the Court, cloathed in a green Suit, with his Leathern Girdle in his hand, his bosom open, and all on a dung sweat, as if he had run for his Life; and, being come in, he spake aloud as follows: *My Lord*, said he, *Here is the veryest Rogue that breaths upon the face of the earth. . . My Lord, there has not been a Robbery committed this many years, within so many miles of this place but I have either been at it or privy to it.*

"The Judge thought the fellow was mad, but after some conference with some of the Justices, they agreed to Indict him; and so they did, of several felonious Actions; to all of which he heartily confessed Guilty, and so was hanged with his wife at the same time. . . .

"As for the truth of this Story, the Relator told me that he was at the same time himself in the Court, and stood within less than two yards of old *Tod*, when he heard him aloud to utter the words."—Bunyan's *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, 1680.

the utterance) illustrates the idea in a more obvious but less individual way.

Perhaps for sheer perfection of art, for fundamental tragedy, for a quality of compassionate and unflinching imaginative vision, nothing in the book quite comes up to *Halbert and Hob*. There is hardly in Browning a more elemental touch than that of: "A boy threw stones: he picked them up and stored them in his breast." *Martin Relph*, besides being a fine tale splendidly told, is among the most masterly of all renderings of remorse, of the terrors and torments of conscience. Every word is like a drop of agony wrung out of a tortured soul. *Ivân Ivânovitch* is, as a narrative, still finer: as a piece of story-telling Browning has perhaps never excelled it. Nothing could be more graphic and exciting than the description of the approach of the wolves: the effective change from iambs to anapæsts gives their very motion.

"Was that—wind?
Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his ears, he snuffs,
Snorts,—never such a snort! then plunges, knows the sough's
Only the wind: yet, no—our breath goes up too straight!
Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder, at a rate
There's no mistaking more! Shall I lean out—look—learn
The truth whatever it be? Pad, pad! At last, I turn——
'Tis the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the life in the sledge!
An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a wedge:
They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks ranged each side,
Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide
The four-footed steady advance. The foremost—none may pass:

They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing brass!
But a long way distant still. Droug, save us! He does his best:
Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—one reaches . . .
How utter the rest?"

The setting of the story, the vast motionless Russian landscape, the village life, the men and women, has a singular expressiveness; and the revelation of the woman's character, the exposure of her culpable weakness, seen in the very excuses by which she endeavours to justify herself, is brought about with singularly masterly art. There are moments of essential drama, not least significantly in the last lines, above all in those two pregnant words: "*How otherwise*? asked he."

Ned Bratts takes almost the same position among Browning's humorous poems that *Ivân Ivânovitch* does among his narratives. It is a whole comedy in itself. Surroundings and atmosphere are called up with perfect art and the subtlest sympathy. What opening could be a better preparation for the heated and grotesque utterances of Ned Bratts than the wonderful description of the hot day? It serves to put us into precisely the right mood for seeing and feeling the comic tragedy that follows. Dickens himself never painted a more riotously realistic scene, nor delineated a better ruffian than the murderous rascal precariously converted by Bunyan and his book.

In the midst of these realistic tragedies and comedies, *Pheidippides*, with its clear Greek outline and charm and heroical grace, stands finely contrasted. The measure is of Browning's invention, and is finely appropriate to the character of the poem.

"So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still 'Rejoice!'—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a God loved so well
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
'Athens is saved!' Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed."

28. Dramatic Idyls. Second Series.

[Published in July, 1880. *Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XV. pp. 81-163.]

The second series of *Dramatic Idyls* is bound together, like the first, though somewhat less closely, by a leading idea, which, whether consciously or not, is hinted at in a pointed little prologue: the idea of the paradox of human action, and the apparent antagonism between motive and result. The volume differs considerably from its precursor, and it contains nothing quite equal to the best of the earlier poems. There is more variety, perhaps, but the human interest is less intense, the stories less moving and absorbing. With less humour, there is a much more pronounced element of the grotesque. And most prominent of all is that characteristic of Browning which a great critic has called agility of intellect.

The first poem, *Echetlos*, is full of heroical ardour and firm, manly vigour of movement. Like *Pheidippides*, it is a legend of Marathon. It sings of the mysterious

helper who appeared to the Greeks, in rustic garb and armed with a plough.

> "But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,
> As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the rear,
> Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.
>
> . . . .
>
> Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,
> The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,
> As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede."

After the battle, the man was nowhere to be seen, and inquiry was made of the oracle.

> "How spake the Oracle? 'Care for no name at all!
> Say but just this: We praise one helpful whom we call
> The Holder of the Ploughshare. The great deed ne'er grows small.'"

With *Echetlos* may be mentioned the Virgilian legend of *Pan and Luna*, a piece of graceful fancy, with its exquisite burden, that

> "Verse of five words, each a boon:
> Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon."

Clive, the most popular in style, and certainly one of the finest poems in the volume, is a dramatic monologue very much akin, in subject, treatment and form, to the narratives in the first series. The story deals with an episode in the life of Clive, when, as a young man, he first proved his courage in the face of a bully whom he had caught cheating at cards. The poem is full of fire and brilliance, and is a subtle analysis and presentation of the character of Clive. Its structure is quite in Browning's best manner: a central situation, illumined

by "what double and treble reflection and refraction!" Like Balzac (whose *Honorine*, for instance, is constructed on precisely similar lines) Browning often increases the effect of his picture by setting it in a framework, more or less elaborate, by placing the central narrative in the midst of another slighter and secondary one, related to it in some subtle way. The story of *Clive* obtains emphasis, and is rendered more impressive, by the lightly but strongly sketched-in figure of the old veteran who tells the tale. Scarcely anything in the poem seems to me so fine as this pathetic portrait of the lonely old man, sitting, like Colonel Newcome, solitary in his house among his memories, with his boy away: "I and Clive were friends."

The Arabian tale of *Muléykeh* is the most perfect and pathetic piece in the volume. It is told in singularly fine verse, and in remarkably clear, simple, yet elevated style. The end is among the great heroic things in poetry. Hóseyn, though he has neither herds nor flocks, is the richest and happiest of men, for he possesses the peerless mare, Muléykeh the Pearl, whose speed has never been outstripped. Duhl, the son of Sheybán, who envies Hóseyn and has endeavoured by every means, but without success, to obtain the mare, determines at last to steal her. He enters Hóseyn's tent noiselessly by night, saddles Muléykeh, and gallops away. In an instant Hóseyn is on the back of Buhéyseh, the Pearl's sister, only less fleet than herself, and in pursuit.

"And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long
since to ride,
And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining
fast

On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be spied!
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and queer:
Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and must,
Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—joy! fear!
What folly makes Hóseyn shout 'Dog Duhl, Damned son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's left flank!'

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt perceived
Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for evermore.
And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may:
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping: and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bênu-Asád
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his grief;
And he told them from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound

His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so
bad!
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with
the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: 'Poor Hóseyn is crazed
past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite!
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or
girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by
night!'
'And the beaten in speed!' wept Hóseyn: 'You never
have loved my Pearl!'"

There remain *Pietro of Abano*[1] and *Doctor* ——. The latter, a Talmudic legend, is probably the poorest of Browning's poems: it is rather farce than humour. The former is a fine piece of genuine grotesque art, full of pungent humour, acuteness, worldly wisdom, and clever phrasing and rhyming. It is written in an elaborate comic metre of Browning's invention, indicated at the end by eight bars of music. The poem is one of the most characteristic examples of that "Teutonic grotesque, which lies in the expression of deep ideas through fantastic forms," a grotesque of noble and cultivated art, of which Browning is as great a master in poetry as Carlyle in prose.

[1] Pietro of Abano was an Italian physician, alchemist and philosopher, born at Abano, near Padua, in 1246, died about 1320. He had the reputation of a wizard, and was imprisoned by the Inquisition. He was condemned to be burnt; he died in prison, and his dead body was ordered to be burnt; but as that had been taken away by his friends, the Inquisition burnt his portrait. His reputed antipathy to milk and cheese, with its natural analogy, suggested the motive of the poem. The book referred to in it is his principal work, *Conciliator differentiarum quæ inter philosophos et medicos versantur.* Mantua, 1472.

The volume ends with a charming lyrical epilogue, not without its personal bearing, though it has sometimes, very unfairly, been represented as a piece of mere self-gratulation.

> "Thus I wrote in London, musing on my betters,"

Browning tells us in some album-verses which have found their way into print, and he naturally complains that what he wrote of Dante should be foisted upon himself. Indeed, he has quite as much the characteristics of the "spontaneous" as of the "brooding" poet of his parable.

> "'Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke:
> Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
> Not one flower-dust fell, but straight its fall awoke
> Vitalising virtue: song would song succeed
> Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet soul!"
> Indeed?
> Rock's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:
> Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
> Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:
> Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age
> Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage."

29. JOCOSERIA.

[Published in March, 1883 (*Poetical Works*, 1889, pp. 165-266).]

The name *Jocoseria* (mentioned by Browning in its original connection, Melander's "Jocoseria," in the notes to *Paracelsus*) expresses very cleverly the particular nature of the volume, in its close union and fusion of grave and gay. The book is not, as a whole, so intense or so

brilliant as the first and second series of *Dramatic Idyls*, but one or two of the shorter poems are, in their way, hardly excelled by anything in either volume.

The longest poem, though by no means the best is the imaginary Rabbinical legend of *Jochanan Hakkadosh* (John the Saint), which Browning, with a touch of learned quizzicalness, states in his note[1] "to have no better authority than that of the treatise, existing dispersedly, in fragments of Rabbinical writing, [the name, 'Collection of many Lies,' follows in Hebrew,] from which I might have helped myself more liberally." It is written in *terza rima*, like *Doctor*—in the second series of *Dramatic Idyls*, and is supposed to be told by "the Jew aforesaid" in order to "make amends and justify our Mishna." That it may to some extent do, but it seems to me that its effectiveness as an example of the serio-grotesque style would have been heightened by some metre less sober and placid than the *terza rima*; by rhythm and rhyme as audacious and characteristic as the rhythm and the rhymes of *Pietro of Abano*, for instance.

Ixion, a far finer poem than *Jochanan Hakkadosh*, is, no doubt, an equally sincere utterance of personal belief. The poem is a monologue, in unrhymed hexameters and pentameters. It presents the old myth in a new light. Ixion is represented as the Prometheus of man's righteous revolt against the tyranny of an unjust God. The poem is conceived in a spirit of intense earnestness, and worked out with great vigour and splendour of diction. For passion and eloquence nothing in it surpasses the

[1] This note contains three burlesque sonnets whose chief interest is, that they are, with the exception of the unclaimed sonnet printed in the *Monthly Repository* in 1834, the first sonnets ever published by Browning.

finely culminating last lines, of which I can but tear a few, only too barbarously, from their context :—

"What is the influence, high o'er Hell, that turns to a rapture
Pain—and despair's murk mists blends in a rainbow of hope ?
What is beyond the obstruction, stage by stage tho' it baffle ?
Back must I fall, confess 'Ever the weakness I fled' ?
No, for beyond, far, far is a Purity all-unobstructed !
Zeus was Zeus—not Man : wrecked by his weakness I whirl.
Out of the wreck I rise—past Zeus to the Potency o'er him !
I—to have hailed him my friend ! I—to have clasped her—my love !
Pallid birth of my pain,—where light, where light is, aspiring
Thither I rise, whilst thou—Zeus, keep the godship and sink !"

While *Ixion* is the noblest and most heroically passionate of these poems, *Adam, Lilith, and Eve*, is the most pregnant and suggestive. Browning has rarely excelled it in certain qualities, hardly found in any other poet, of pungency, novelty, and penetrating bitter-sweetness.

"ADAM, LILITH, AND EVE.

One day it thundered and lightened.
Two women, fairly frightened,
Sank to their knees, transformed, transfixed,
At the feet of the man who sat betwixt ;
And 'Mercy !' cried each, 'If I tell the truth
Of a passage in my youth !'

Said This : 'Do you mind the morning
I met your love with scorning ?
As the worst of the venom left my lips,
I thought, "If, despite this lie, he strips

The mask from my soul with a kiss—I crawl,
His slave,—soul, body and all!"'

Said That: 'We stood to be married;
The priest, or someone, tarried;
"If Paradise-door prove locked?" smiled you.
I thought, as I nodded, smiling too,
"Did one, that's away, arrive—nor late
Nor soon should unlock Hell's gate!"'

It ceased to lighten and thunder.
Up started both in wonder,
Looked round, and saw that the sky was clear,
Then laughed, 'Confess you believed us, Dear!'
'I saw through the joke!' the man replied
They seated themselves beside."

Much of the same power is shown in *Cristina and Monaldeschi*,[1] a dramatic monologue with all the old vigour of Browning's early work of that kind; not only keen and subtle, but charged with a sharp electrical quality, which from time to time darts out with a sudden and unexpected shock. The style and tone are infused with a peculiar fierce irony. The metre is rapid and stinging, like the words of the vindictive queen as she hurries her treacherous victim into the hands of the assassins. There is dramatic invention in the very cadence:

"Ah, but how each loved each, Marquis!
    Here's the gallery they trod
    Both together, he her god,
    She his idol,—lend your rod,

[1] One can scarcely read this poem without recalling the superb and not unsimilar episode in prose of another "great dramatic poet," Landor's Imaginary Conversation between the Empress Catherine and Princess Dashkof.

Chamberlain !—ay, there they are—'*Quis*
Separabit?'—plain those two
Touching words come into view,
Apposite for me and you!"

Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli, a dramatic lyric of three verses, the pathetic utterance of an unloved loving woman's heart, is not dissimilar in style to *Cristina and Monaldeschi*. It would be unjust to Fuseli to name him Bottom, but only fair to Mary Wollstonecraft to call her Titania.

Of the remaining poems, *Donald* ("a true story, repeated to Mr. Browning by one who had heard it from its hero, the so-called Donald, himself,"[1]) is a ballad, not at all in Browning's best style, but certainly vigorous and striking, directed against the brutalising influences of sport, as *Tray* was directed against the infinitely worse brutalities of ignorant and indiscriminate vivisection. Its noble human sympathies and popular style appeal to a ready audience. *Solomon and Balkis*, though by no means among the best of Browning's comic poems, is a witty enough little tale from that inexhaustible repository, the Talmud. It is a dialogue between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, not "solely" nor at all "of things sublime." *Pambo* is a bit of pointed fun, a mock-modest apology to critics. Finally, besides a musical little love-song named *Wanting is—What?* we have in *Never the Time and the Place* one of the great love-songs, not easily to be excelled, even in the work of Browning, for strength of spiritual passion and intensity of exultant and certain hope.

[1] Mrs. Orr, *Handbook*, p. 313.

"Never the Time and the Place.

Never the time and the place
  And the loved one all together!
This path—how soft to pace!
  This May—what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
  But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
  With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
  With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
  Uncoil thee from the waking man!
    Do I hold the Past
    Thus firm and fast
  Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
  This path so soft to pace shall lead
  Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
  Or narrow if needs the house must be,
  Outside are the storms and strangers: we—
  Oh, close, safe, warm, sleep I and she,
  —I and she!"

30. Ferishtah's Fancies.

[Published in November, 1884 (*Poetical Works*, 1898, Vol. XVI. pp. 1-92).]

Ferishtah's Fancies consists of twelve sections, each an argument in an allegory, Persian by presentment, modern or universal in intention.[1] Lightly laid in between the sections, like flowers between the leaves, are twelve lyrics,

[1] This is emphasized by the ingenious motto from *King Lear*: "You, Sir, I entertain you for one of my hundred; only, I do not like the fashion of your garments: you will say, they are Persian; but let them be changed."

mostly love songs addressed to a beloved memory, each lyric having a close affinity with the preceding "Fancy." A humorous lyrical prologue, and a passionate lyrical epilogue, complete the work. We learn from Mrs. Orr, that

> "The idea of *Ferishtah's Fancies* grew out of a fable by Pilpay, which Mr. Browning read when a boy. He . . put this into verse; and it then occurred to him to make the poem the beginning of a series, in which the Dervish who is first introduced as a learner should reappear in the character of a teacher. Ferishtah's 'fancies' are the familiar illustrations by which his teachings are enforced."[1]

The book is Browning's *West-Eastern Divan*, and it is written at nearly the same age as Goethe's. But, though there is a good deal of local colour in the setting, no attempt, as the motto warns us, is made to reproduce Eastern thought. The "Persian garments" are used for a disguise, not as a habit; perhaps for the very reason that the thoughts they drape are of such intense personal sincerity. The drapery, however, is perfectly transparent, and one may read "Robert Browning" for "Dervish Ferishtah" *passim*.

The first two fancies (*The Eagle* and *The Melon-Seller*) give the lessons which Ferishtah learnt, and which determined him to become a Dervish: all the rest are his own lessons to others. These deal severally with faith (*Shah Abbas*), prayer (*The Family*), the Incarnation (*The Sun*), the meaning of evil and of pain (*Mihrab Shah*), punishment present and future (*A Camel-Driver*), asceticism (*Two Camels*), gratefulness to God for small benefits (*Cherries*), the direct personal relation existing

[1] *Handbook*, p. 321.

between man and God (*Plot-Culture*), the uncertain value of knowledge contrasted with the sure gain of love (*A Pillar at Sebzevah*), and, finally, in *A Bean-Stripe: also Apple Eating*, the problem of life: is it more good than evil, or more evil than good? The work is a serious attempt to grapple with these great questions, and is as important on its ethical as on its artistic side. Each argument is conveyed by means of a parable, often brilliant, often quaint, always striking and serviceable, and always expressed in scrupulously clear and simple language. The teaching, put more plainly and definitely, perhaps, with less intellectual disguise than usual, is the old unconquered optimism which, in Browning, is so unmistakably a matter of temperament.

The most purely delightful poetry in the volume will be found in the delicate and musical love-songs which brighten its pages. They are snatches of spontaneous and exquisite song, bird-notes seldom heard except from the lips of youth. Perhaps the most perfect is the first.

"Round us the wild creatures, overhead the trees,
Underfoot the moss-tracks,—life and love with these!
I to wear a fawn-skin, thou to dress in flowers:
All the long lone Summer-day, that greenwood life of ours!

Rich-pavilioned, rather,—still the world without,—
Inside—gold-roofed silk-walled silence round about!
Queen it thou in purple,—I, at watch and ward
Couched beneath the columns, gaze, thy slave, love's guard!

So, for us no world? Let throngs press thee to me!
Up and down amid men, heart by heart fare we!
Welcome squalid vesture, harsh voice, hateful face!
God is soul, souls I and thou: with souls should souls have place."

"With souls should souls have place," is, with Browning, the condensed expression of an experience, a philosophy, and an art. Like the lovers of his lyric, he has renounced the selfish serenities of wild-wood and dream-palace; he has gone up and down among men, listening to that human music, and observing that human or divine comedy. He has sung what he has heard, and he has painted what he has seen. If it should be asked whether such work will live, there can be only one answer, and he has already given it:

"It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man."

31. Parleyings with certain people of importance in their day.

[Published in January 1887. *Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XVI., pp. 93-275.]

The method of the *Parleyings* is something of a new departure, and at the same time something of a reversion. It is a reversion towards the dramatic form of the monologue; but it is a new departure owing to the precise form assumed, that of a "parleying" or colloquy of the author with his characters. The persons with whom Browning parleys are representative men selected from the England, Holland, and Italy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The parleying with *Bernard de Mandeville* (born at Dort, in Holland, 1670; died in London, 1733; author of *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits*) takes up the optimistic arguments already developed in *Ferishtah's*

Fancies and elsewhere, and preaches, through the dubious medium of the enigmatic fabulist, trust in the ordering of the world, confidence in discerning a "soul of goodness in things evil." *Daniel Bartoli* ("a learned and ingenius writer," born at Florence, 1608; died at Rome, 1685; the historian of the Order of Jesuits) serves to point a moral against himself, in the contrast between the pale ineffectual saints of his legendary record and the practically saint-like heroine of a true tale recounted by Browning, the graphic and brilliant story of the duke and the druggist's daughter. The parleying with *Christopher Smart* (the author of the *Song to David*, born at Shipborne, in Kent, 1722; died in the King's Bench, 1770) is a penetrating and characteristic study in one of the great poetic problems of the eighteenth century, the problem of a "void and null" verse-writer who, at one moment only of his life, sang, as Browning reminds him,

> "A song where flute-breath silvers trumpet-clang,
> And stations you for once on either hand
> With Milton and with Keats."

George Bubb Dodington (Lord Melcombe, born 1691; died 1762) stands as type of the dishonest politician, and in the course of a colloquy, which is really a piece of sardonic irony long drawn out, a mock serious essay in the way of a Superior Rogues' Guide or Instructions for Knaves, receives at once castigation and instruction. The parleying with *Francis Furini* (born at Florence, 1600; died 1649) deals with its hero as a man, as artist and as priest; it contains some of Browning's noblest writing on art; and it touches on current and, indeed, continual controversies in its splendidly vigorous on-

slaught on the decriers of that supreme art which aims at painting men and women as God made them. *Gerard de Lairesse* (born at Liége, in Flanders, 1640; died at Amsterdam 1711; famed not only for his pictures, but for his *Treatise on the Art of Painting*, composed after he had become blind) gives his name to a discussion on the artistic interpretation of nature, its change and advancement, and the deeper and truer vision which has displaced the mythological fancies of earlier painters and poets. The parleying with *Charles Avison* (born at Newcastle, 1710; died there, 1770), the more than half forgotten organist-composer, embodies an inquiry, critical or speculative, into the position and function of music. All these poems are written in decasyllabic rhymed verse, with varied arrangement of the rhymes. They are introduced by a dialogue between Apollo and the Fates, and concluded by another between John Fust and his friends, both written in lyrical measures, both uniting deep seriousness of intention with capricious humour of form; the one wild and stormy as the great "Dance of Furies" in Gluck's *Orfeo;* the other quaint and grimly and sublimely grotesque as an old German print. *Gerard de Lairesse* contains a charming little "Spring Song" of three stanzas; and *Charles Avison* a sounding train-bands' chorus, written to the air of one of Avison's marches.

The volume as a whole is full of weight, brilliance, and energy; and it is not less notable for its fineness of versification, its splendour of sound and colour, than for its depth and acuteness of thought and keen grasp of intricate argument. Indeed, the quality which more than any other distinguishes it from Browning's later

work is the careful writing of the verse, and the elaborate beauty of certain passages. Much of Browning's later work would be ill represented by a selection of the "purple patches." His strength has always lain, but of late has lain much more exclusively, in the *ensemble*. Here, however, there is not merely one passage of more than a hundred and fifty lines, the like of which (I do not say in every sense the equal, but certainly the like of which) we must go back to *Sordello* or to *Paracelsus* to find; but, again and again, wherever we turn, we meet with more than usually fine and impressive passages, single lines of more than usually exquisite quality. The glory of the whole collection is certainly the "Walk," or description, in rivalry with Gerard de Lairesse, of a whole day's changes, from sunrise to sunset. To equal it in its own way, we must look a long way back in our Browning, and nowhere out of Browning. Where all is good, any preference must seem partial; but perhaps nothing in it is finer than this picture of morning.

"But morning's laugh sets all the crags alight
Above the baffled tempest: tree and tree
Stir themselves from the stupor of the night
And every strangled branch resumes its right
To breathe, shakes loose dark's clinging dregs, waves
free
In dripping glory. Prone the runnels plunge,
While earth, distent with moisture like a sponge,
Smokes up, and leaves each plant its gem to see,
Each grass-blade's glory-glitter. Had I known
The torrent now turned river?—masterful
Making its rush o'er tumbled ravage—stone
And stub which barred the froths and foams: no bull
Ever broke bounds in formidable sport

More overwhelmingly, till lo, the spasm
Sets him to dare that last mad leap : report
Who may—his fortunes in the deathly chasm
That swallows him in silence ! Rather turn
Whither, upon the upland, pedestalled
Into the broad day-splendour, whom discern
These eyes but thee, supreme one, rightly called
Moon-maid in heaven above and, here below,
Earth's huntress-queen ? I note the garb succinct
Saving from smirch that purity of snow
From breast to knee—snow's self with just the tint
Of the apple-blossom's heart-blush. Ah, the bow
Slack-strung her fingers grasp, where, ivory-linked
Horn curving blends with horn, a moonlike pair
Which mimic the brow's crescent sparkling so—
As if a star's live restless fragment winked
Proud yet repugnant, captive in such hair !
What hope along the hillside, what far bliss
Lets the crisp hair-plaits fall so low they kiss
Those lucid shoulders ? Must a morn so blithe
Needs have its sorrow when the twang and hiss
Tell that from out thy sheaf one shaft makes writhe
Its victim, thou unerring Artemis ?
Why did the chamois stand so fair a mark,
Arrested by the novel shape he dreamed
Was bred of liquid marble in the dark
Depths of the mountain's womb which ever teemed
With novel births of wonder ? Not one spark
Of pity in that steel-grey glance which gleamed
At the poor hoof's protesting as it stamped
Idly the granite ? Let me glide unseen
From thy proud presence : well may'st thou be queen
Of all those strange and sudden deaths which damped
So oft Love's torch and Hymen's taper lit
For happy marriage till the maidens paled
And perished on the temple-step, assailed
By—what except to envy must man's wit
Impute that sure implacable release
Of life from warmth and joy ? But death means peace.

32. Asolando: Fancies and Facts.

[Dated 1890, but published December 12, 1889. *Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XVII., pp. iv., 131.]

Asolando (a name taken from the invented verb *Asolare*, "to disport in the open air") was published on the day of Browning's death. He died in Venice, and his body was brought to England, and buried in Westminster Abbey on the last day of the year. The Abbey was invisible in the fog, and, inside, dim yellow fog filled all the roof, above the gas and the candles. The coffin, carried high, came into the church to the sound of processional music, and as one waited near the grave one saw the coffin and the wreaths on it, over the heads of the people, and heard, in Dr. Bridge's setting, the words: "He giveth his beloved sleep."

Reading *Asolando* once more, and remembering that coffin one had looked down upon in the Abbey, only then quite feeling that all was indeed over, it is perhaps natural that the book should come to seem almost consciously testamentary, as if certain things in it had been really meant for a final leave-taking. The Epilogue is a clear, brave looking-forward to death, as to an event now close at hand, and imagined as actually accomplished. It breaks through for once, as if at last the occasion demanded it, a reticence never thus broken through before, claiming, with a supreme self-confidence, calmly, as an acknowledged right, the "Well done" of the faithful servant at the end of the long day's labour. In *Reverie*, in *Rephan*, and in other poems, the teachings of a lifetime are enforced

with a final emphasis, there is the same joyous readiness to "aspire yet never attain;" the same delight in the beauty and strangeness of life, in the "wild joy of living," in woman, in art, in scholarship; and in *Rosny* we have the vision of a hero dead on the field of victory, with the comment, "That is best."

To those who value Browning, not as the poet of metaphysics, but as the poet of life, his last book will be singularly welcome. Something like metaphysics we find, indeed, but humanised, made poetry, in the blank verse of *Development*, the lyrical verse of the *Prologue*, and the third of the *Bad Dreams*, with their subtle comments and surmises on the relations of art with nature, of nature with truth. But it is life itself, a final flame, perhaps mortally bright, that burns and shines in the youngest of Browning's books. The book will be not less welcome to those who feel that the finest poetic work is usually to be found in short pieces, and that even *The Ring and the Book* would scarcely be an equivalent for the fifty *Men and Women* of those two incomparable volumes of 1855. Nor is *Asolando* without a further attractiveness to those who demand in poetry a certain fleeting and evanescent grace.

> "Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
> Pas la Couleur, rien que la Nuance,"

as Paul Verlaine says, somewhat exclusively, in his poetical confession of faith. It is, indeed, *la Nuance*, the last fine shade, that Browning has captured and fixed for us in those lovely love-poems, *Summum Bonum*, *Poetics*, *a Pearl*, *a Girl*, and the others, so young-hearted,

so joyous and buoyant; and in the woody piping of *Flute Music, with an Accompaniment.* Simple and eager in *Dubiety*, daintily, prettily pathetic in *Humility*, more intense in *Speculative*, in the fourteen lines called *Now*, the passion of the situation leaps like a cry from the heart, and one may say that the poem is, rather than renders, the very fever of the supreme moment, "the moment eternal."

"Now.

Out of your whole life give but a moment:
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it,—so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present,—condense,
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense—
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me, above me—
Me—sure that despite of time future, time past,—
This tick of our life-time's one moment you love me!
How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet—
The moment eternal—just that and no more—
When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core,
While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!"

Here the whole situation is merged in the single cry, the joy, "unbodied" and "embodied," of any, of every lover; in several of the poems a more developed story is told or indicated. One of the finest pieces in the volume is the brief dramatic monologue called *Inapprehensiveness*, which condenses a whole tragedy into its thirty-two lines, in the succinct, suggestive manner of such poems as *My Last Duchess.* Only Heine, Browning, and George Meredith in *Modern Love*, each in his entirely individual way, have succeeded in dealing, in a tone of what I may call sympathetic irony, with the

unheroic complications of modern life; so full of poetic matter really, but of matter so difficult to handle. The poem is a mere incident, such as happens every day: we are permitted to overhear a scrap of trivial conversation; but this very triviality does but deepen the effect of what we surmise, a dark obstruction, underneath the "babbling runnel" of light talk. A study not entirely dissimilar, though, as its name warns us, more difficult to grasp, is the fourth of the *Bad Dreams:* how fine, how impressive, in its dream-distorted picture of a man's remorse for the love he has despised or neglected till death, coming in, makes love and repentance alike too late! With these may be named that other electric little poem, *Which?* a study in love's casuistries, reminding one slightly of the finest of all Browning's studies in that kind, *Adam, Lilith, and Eve.*

It is in these small poems, dealing varyingly with various phases of love, that the finest, the rarest, work in the volume is to be found. Such a poem as *Imperante Augusto natus est* (strong, impressive, effective as it is) cannot but challenge comparison with what is incomparable, the dramatic monologues of *Men and Women*, and in particular with the *Epistle of Karshish.* In *Beatrice Signorini* we have one of the old studies in lovers' casuistries; and it is told with gusto, but is after all scarcely more than its last line claims for it: "The pretty incident I put in rhyme." In the *Ponte dell' Angelo, Venice*, we find one of the old grotesques, but more loosely "hitched into rhyme" (it is his own word) than the better among those poems which it most resembles. But there is something not precisely similar to anything that had gone before in the dainty simplicity,

the frank, beautiful fervour, of such lyrics as *Summum Bonum*, in which exquisite expression is given to the merely normal moods of ordinary affection. In most of Browning's love poems the emotion is complex, the situation more or less exceptional. It is to this that they owe their singular, penetrating quality of charm. But there is a charm of another kind, and a more generally appreciated one,

> "that commonplace
> Perfection of honest grace,"

which lies in the expression of feelings common to everyone, feelings which everyone can without difficulty make or imagine his own. In the lyrics to which I am referring, Browning has spoken straight out, in just this simple, direct way, and with a delicate grace and smoothness of rhythm not always to be met with in his later work. Here is a poem called *Speculative*:

> "Others may need new life in Heaven—
>   Man, Nature, Art—made new, assume!
> Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
>   Nature—new light to clear old gloom,
> Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.
>
> I shall pray: 'Fugitive as precious—
>   Minutes which passed—return, remain!
> Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
>   You with old pleasure, me—old pain,
> So we but meet nor part again.'"

How hauntingly does that give voice to the instinctive, the universal feeling! the lover's intensity of desire for the loved and lost one, for herself, the "little human woman full of sin," for herself, unchanged, unglorified, as she was on earth, not as she may be in a vague heaven.

To the lover in *Summum Bonum* all the delight of life has been granted; it lies in "the kiss of one girl," and that has been his. In the delicious little poem called *Humility*, the lover is content in being "proudly less," a thankful pensioner on the crumbs of love's feast, laid for another. In *White Witchcraft* love has outlived injury; in the first of the *Bad Dreams* it has survived even heart-break.

> "Last night I saw you in my sleep:
>   And how your charm of face was changed!
> I asked 'Some love, some faith you keep?'
>   You answered, 'Faith gone, love estranged.'
>
> Whereat I woke—a twofold bliss:
>   Waking was one, but next there came
> This other: 'Though I felt, for this,
>   My heart break, I loved on the same.'"

Not subtlety, but simplicity, a simplicity pungent as only Browning could make it, is the characteristic of most of the best work in this last volume of a poet pre-eminently subtle. This characteristic of simplicity is seen equally in the love-poems and in the poems of satire, in the ballads and in the narrative pieces, and notably in the story of *The Pope and the Net*, an anecdote in verse, told with the frank relish of the thing, and without the least attempt to tease a moral out of it.

There are other light ballads, as different in merit as *Muckle-mouth Meg* on the one hand and *The Cardinal and the Dog* and *The Bean-Feast* on the other, with snatches of moralising story, as cutting as *Arcades Ambo*, which is a last word written for love of beasts, and as stinging as *The Lady and the Painter*, which is a last word written for love of birds and of the

beauty of nakedness. One among these poems, *The Cardinal and the Dog*, indistinguishable in style from the others, was written fifty years earlier. It is as if the poet, taking leave of that "British public" which had "loved him not," and to whose caprices he had never condescended, was, after all, anxious to "part friends." The result may be said, in a measure, to have been attained.

So far I wrote in 1889, when Browning was only just dead, and I went on, in words which I keep for their significance to-day, because time has already brought in its revenges, and Browning has conquered. That Browning, I said then, could ever become a popular poet, in the sense in which Tennyson is popular, must be seen by everyone to be an impossibility. His poetry is obviously written for his own pleasure, without reference to the tastes of the bulk of readers. The very titles of his poems, the barest outline of their prevailing subjects, can but terrify or bewilder an easy-going public, which prefers to take its verse somnolently, at the season of the day when the newspaper is too substantial, too exciting. To appreciate Browning you must read with your eyes wide open. His poetry is rarely obscure, but it is often hard. It deals by preference with hard matter, with "men and the ideas of men," with life and thought. Other poets before him have written with equally independent aims; but had Milton, had Wordsworth, a larger and more admiring audience in his own day? If the audience of Milton and of Wordsworth has widened, it would be the merest paradox to speak of either Milton or Wordsworth as a

popular poet. By this time, every one at least knows them by name, though it would be a little unkind to consider too curiously how large a proportion of the people who know them by name have read many consecutive lines of *Paradise Lost* or *The Excursion*. But to be so generally known by name is something, and it has not yet fallen to the lot of Browning. "Browning is dead," said a friend of mine, a hunting man, to another hunting man, a friend of his. "Dear me, is he?" said the other doubtfully; "did he 'come out' your way?" By the time Browning has been dead as long as Wordsworth, I do not think anyone will be found to make these remarks. Death, not only from the Christian standpoint, is the necessary pathway to immortality. As it is, Browning's fame has been steadily increasing, at first slowly enough, latterly with even a certain rapidity. From the first he has had the exceptional admiration of those whose admiration is alone really significant, whose applause can alone be really grateful to a self-respecting writer. No poet of our day, no poet, perhaps, of any day, has been more secure in the admiring fellowship of his comrades in letters. And of all the poets of our day, it is he whose influence seems to be most vital at the moment, most pregnant for the future. For the time, he has also an actual sort of church of his own. The churches pass, with the passing away of the worshippers; but the spirit remains, and must remain if it has once been so vivid to men, if it has once been a refuge, a promise of strength, a gift of consolation. And there has been all this, over and above its supreme poetic quality, in the vast and various work, Shakesperean in breadth, Shakesperean in penetration, of the poet whose

last words, the appropriate epilogue of a lifetime, were these:

"At the midnight, in the silence of the sleep-time,
  When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
  Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
    —Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
  What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
  Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
    —Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
  Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
  Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
    Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
  Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
  'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed,—fight on, fare ever
    There as here!'"

APPENDIX

I

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT BROWNING

The following list of the published writings of Robert Browning, in the order of their publication, has been compiled mainly from Dr. Furnivall's very complete and serviceable Browning Bibliography, contained in the first part of the Browning Society's Papers (pp. 21-71). Volumes of "Selections" are not noticed in this list: there have been many in England, some in Germany, and in the Tauchnitz Collection, and a large number in America, where an edition of the complete works was first published, in seven volumes, by Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston.

1. Pauline: a Fragment of a Confession. London: Saunders and Otley, Conduit Street. 1833, pp. 71.

2. Paracelsus. By Robert Browning. London. Published by Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange. MDCCCXXXV., pp. xi., 216.

3. Five Poems contributed to *The Monthly Repository* (edited by W. J. Fox), 1834-6; all signed "Z."—I. Sonnet ("Eyes, calm beside thee, Lady, couldst thou know!"), Vol. VIII., New Series, 1834, p. 712. Not reprinted. II. The King—(Vol. IX., New Series, pp. 707-8). Reprinted, with six fresh lines, and revised throughout, in *Pippa Passes* (1841), where it is Pippa's song in Part III. —III., IV. Porphyria and Johannes Agricola. (Vol. X., pp. 43-6.) Reprinted in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) under the title of *Madhouse Cells.*—V. Lines. (Vol. X., pp. 270-1.) Reprinted, revised, in *Dramatis Personæ* (1864) as the first six stanzas of § VI. of *James Lee.*

4. Strafford: an Historical Tragedy. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, Paternoster Row. 1837, pp. vi., 131.

5. Sordello. By Robert Browning. London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXL., pp. iv., 253.

6. Bells and Pomegranates: No. I.—Pippa Passes. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLI., pp. 16. (Price 6*d*., sewed.)

7. Bells and Pomegranates: No. II.—King Victor and King Charles. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLII., pp. 20. (Price 1*s*., sewed).

8. Bells and Pomegranates: No. III.—Dramatic Lyrics. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLII., pp. 16. (Price 1*s*., sewed.)

Contents:—1. Cavalier Tunes: I. Marching Along; II. Give a Rouse; III. My Wife Gertrude [Boot and Saddle, 1863]. 2. Italy and France: I. Italy [My Last Duchess.—Ferrara, 1863]; II. France [Count Gismond.—Aix in Provence, 1863]. 3. Camp and Cloister: I. Camp (French) [Incident of the French Camp, 1863]; II. Cloister (Spanish) [Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, 1863]. 4. In a Gondola. 5. Artemis Prologuizes. 6. Waring. 7. Queen Worship: I. Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli; II. Cristina. 8. Madhouse Cells: I. [Johannes Agricola, 1863]; II. [Porphyria's Lover, 1863]. 9. Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr. 10. The Pied Piper of Hamelin.

9. Bells and Pomegranates: No. IV.—The Return of the Druses. A Tragedy in Five Acts. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLIII., pp. 19. (Price 1*s*., sewed.)

10. Bells and Pomegranates: No. V.—A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. A Tragedy in Three Acts. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward

Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLIII., pp. 16. (Price 1*s*., sewed.)

11. BELLS AND POMEGRANATES: No. VI.—COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY. A Play in Five Acts. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLIV., pp. 20. (Price 1*s*., sewed.)

12. Eight Poems contributed to *Hood's Magazine*, June 1844 to April 1845:—I. The Laboratory (Ancien Régime). (June 1844, Vol. I., No. vi., pp. 513-14). Reprinted in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), as the first of two poems called "France and Spain."—II., III. Claret and Tokay (*id*. p. 525). Reprinted in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).—IV., V. Garden Fancies: 1. The Flower's Name; 2. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis. (July 1844, Vol. II., No. vii., pp. 45-48.) Reprinted in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).—VI. The Boy and the Angel. (August 1844, Vol. II., No. viii., pp. 140-2.) Reprinted, revised, and with five fresh couplets, in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).—VII. The Tomb at St. Praxed's (Rome, 15—) (March 1845, Vol. III., No. iii., pp. 237-39). Reprinted in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845)—VIII. The Flight of the Duchess. (April 1845, Vol. III., No. iv., pp. 313-18.) Part first only, § 1-9; reprinted, with the remainder added, in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).

13. BELLS AND POMEGRANATES: No. VII. — DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLV., pp. 24. (Price 2*s*., sewed.)

Contents:—1. How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix. 2. Pictor Ignotus [Florence, 15—]. 3. Italy in England [The Italian in England, 1849]. 4. England in Italy, *Piano di Sorrento* [The Englishman in Italy, 1849]. 5. The Lost Leader. 6. The Lost Mistress. 7. Home Thoughts from Abroad. 8. The Tomb at St. Praxed's [The Bishop orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church, 1863]. 9. Garden Fancies: I. The Flower's Name; II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis. 10. France and Spain: I. The

Laboratory (*Ancien Régime*); II. The Confessional. 11. The Flight of the Duchess. 12. Earth's Immortalities. 13. Song. 14. The Boy and the Angel. 15. Night and Morning: I. Night [Meeting at Night, 1863], II. Morning [Parting at Morning, 1863]. 16. Claret and Tokay [Nationality in Drinks, 1863]. 17. Saul. 18. Time's Revenges. 19. The Glove (Peter Ronsard *loquitur*).

14. BELLS AND POMEGRANATES: No. VIII. and last.—LURIA; and A SOUL'S TRAGEDY. By Robert Browning, Author of "Paracelsus." London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. MDCCCXLVI., pp. 32. (Price 2*s*. 6*d*., sewed.)

15. POEMS. By Robert Browning. In two volumes. A new edition. London: Chapman and Hall, 186 Strand. 1849, pp. viii., 386; viii., 416. These two volumes contain *Paracelsus* and *Bells and Pomegranates.*

16. CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY. A Poem. By Robert Browning. London: Chapman and Hall, 186 Strand. 1850, pp. iv., 142.

17. Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley. With an INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, by Robert Browning. London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1852, pp. vi., 165. (Introductory Essay, pp., 1-44.)

These so-called Letters of Shelley proved to be forgeries, and the volume was suppressed. Browning's essay has been reprinted by the Browning Society, and, later, by the Shelley Society. See No. 58 below. Its value to students of Shelley is in no way impaired by its chance connection with the forged letters, to which it barely alludes.

18. TWO POEMS. By Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. London: Chapman and Hall. 1854, pp. 16.

This pamphlet contains "A Plea for the Ragged Schools of London," by E. B. B., and "The Twins," by R. B. The two poems were printed by Miss Arabella Barrett, Mrs. Browning's sister, for a bazaar in aid of a "Refuge for Young Destitute Girls," one of the earliest of its kind, founded by her in 1854.

19. Cleon. By Robert Browning. London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. 1855, pp. 23.

20. The Statue and the Bust. By Robert Browning. London: Edward Moxon, Dover Street. 1855, pp. 22.

21. Men and Women. By Robert Browning. In two volumes. London: Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly. 1855. Vol. I., pp. iv., 260; Vol. II., pp. iv., 241.

Vol. I. Contents:—1. Love among the Ruins. 2. A Lovers' Quarrel. 3. Evelyn Hope. 4. Up at a Villa—Down in the City (as distinguished by an Italian person of Quality). 5. A Woman's Last Word. 6. Fra Lippo Lippi. 7. A Toccata of Galuppi's. 8. By the Fire-side. 9. Any Wife to Any Husband. 10. An Epistle containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician. 11. Mesmerism. 12. A Serenade at the Villa. 13. My Star. 14. Instans Tyrannus. 15. A Pretty Woman. 16. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." 17. Respectability. 18. A Light Woman. 19. The Statue and the Bust. 20. Love in a Life. 21. Life in a Love. 22. How it Strikes a Contemporary. 23. The Last Ride Together. 24. The Patriot—*An Old Story*. 25. Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha. 26. Bishop Blougram's Apology. 27. Memorabilia.

Vol. II. Contents:—1. Andrea del Sarto (Called the Faultless Painter). 2. Before. 3. After. 4. In Three Days. 5. In a Year. 6. Old Pictures in Florence. 7. In a Balcony. 8. Saul. 9. "De Gustibus." 10. Women and Roses. 11. Protus. 12. Holy-Cross Day. 13. The Guardian Angel: a Picture at Fano. 14. Cleon. 15. The Twins. 16. Popularity. 17. The Heretic's Tragedy: A Middle Age Interlude. 18. Two in the Campagna. 19. A Grammarian's Funeral. 20. One Way of Love. 21. Another Way of Love. 22. "Transcendentalism": a Poem in Twelve Books. 23. Misconceptions. 24. One Word More: To E. B. B.

22. Ben Karshook's Wisdom. (Five stanzas of four lines each, signed "Robert Browning," and dated "Rome, April 27, 1854")—*The Keepsake*. 1856. (Edited by Miss Power, and published by David Bogue, London.) P. 16.

This poem has never been reprinted by the author in any of his collected volumes, but is to be found in Furnivall's *Browning Bibliography*.

23. May and Death.—*The Keepsake*, 1857, p. 164. Reprinted, with some new readings, in *Dramatis Personæ* (1864).

24. The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. Third edition. Vol. I., pp. x., 432. Lyrics, Romances, Men and Women. Vol. II., pp. 605. Tragedies and other Plays. Vol. III., pp. 465. Paracelsus, Christmas Eve and Easter Day, Sordello. London: Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly. 1863.

There are no new poems in this edition, but the pieces originally published under the titles of *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Lyrics and Romances*, and *Men and Women*, are redistributed. This arrangement has been preserved in all subsequent editions. The table of contents below will thus show the present position of the poems.

Vol. I. Contents—Lyrics:—1. Cavalier Tunes. 2. The Lost Leader. 3. "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix" 4. Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr. 5. Nationality in Drinks. 6. Garden Fancies. [1] 7. The Laboratory. 8. The Confessional. 9. Cristina. 10. The Lost Mistress. 11. Earth's Immortalities. 12. Meeting at Night. 13. Parting at Morning. 14. Song. 15. A Woman's Last Word. 16. Evelyn Hope. 17. Love among the Ruins. 18. A Lovers' Quarrel. 19. Up at a Villa—Down in the City. 20. A Toccata of Galuppi's. 21. Old Pictures in Florence. 22. "De Gustibus——." 23. Home-Thoughts from Abroad. 24. Home-Thoughts from the Sea. 25. Saul. 26. My Star. 27. By the Fire-side. 28. Any Wife to Any Husband. 29. Two in the Campagna. 30. Misconceptions. 31. A Serenade at the Villa. 32. One Way of Love. 33. Another Way of Love. 34. A Pretty Woman. 35. Respectability. 36. Love in a Life. 37. Life in a Love. 38. In Three Days. 39. In a Year. 40. Women and Roses. 41. Before. 42. After. 43. The Guardian Angel. 44. Memorabilia. 45. Popularity. 46. Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.

Romances:—1. Incident of the French Camp. 2. The Patriot. 3. My Last Duchess. 4. Count Gismond. 5. The Boy and the Angel. 6. Instans Tyrannus. 7. Mesmerism. 8. The

[1] The *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* is here included as No. III. In the edition of 1868 it follows under a separate heading. This is the only point of difference between the two editions.

Glove. 9. Time's Revenges. 10. The Italian in England. 11. The Englishman in Italy. 12. In a Gondola. 13. Waring. 14. The Twins. 15. A Light Woman. 16. The Last Ride Together. 17. The Pied Piper of Hamelin. 18. The Flight of the Duchess. 19. A Grammarian's Funeral. 20. Johannes Agricola in Meditation. 21. The Heretic's Tragedy. 22. Holy-Cross Day. 23. Protus. 24. The Statue and the Bust. 25. Porphyria's Lover. 26. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

MEN AND WOMEN :—1. "Transcendentalism." 2. How it strikes a Contemporary. 3. Artemis Prologuizes. 4. An Epistle containing the strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician. 5. Pictor Ignotus. 6. Fra Lippo Lippi. 7. Andrea del Sarto. 8. The Bishop orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church. 9. Bishop Blougram's Apology. 10. Cleon. 11. Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli. 12. One Word More.

Vol. II. Contents—TRAGEDIES AND OTHER PLAYS :—1. Pippa Passes. 2. King Victor and King Charles. 3. The Return of the Druses. 4. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. 5. Colombe's Birthday. 6. Luria. 7. A Soul's Tragedy. 8. In a Balcony. 9. Strafford.

Vol. III. Contents :—1. Paracelsus. 2. Christmas Eve and Easter Day. 3. Sordello.

25. GOLD HAIR : A Legend of Pornic. By Robert Browning. (With imprint—London : Printed by W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford Street and Charing Cross) 1864, pp. 15.

26. Prospice.—*Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XIII., June 1864, p. 694.

27. DRAMATIS PERSONÆ. By Robert Browning. London : Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly. 1864, pp. vi., 250.

Contents :—1. James Lee [James Lee's Wife, 1868]. 2. Gold Hair : a Legend of Pornic. 3. The Worst of it. 4. Dîs aliter visum ; or, Le Byron de nos jours. 5. Too Late. 6. Abt Vogler. 7. Rabbi ben Ezra. 8. A Death in the Desert. 9. Caliban upon Setebos ; or, Natural Theology in the Island. 10. Confessions. 11. May and Death. 12. Prospice. 13. Youth and Art. 14. A Face. 15. A Likeness. 16. Mr Sludge "The Medium." 17. Apparent Failure. 18. Epilogue.

28. Orpheus and Eurydice.—*Catalogue of the Royal Academy*, 1864, p. 13. No. 217. A picture by F. Leighton.

Printed as prose. It is reprinted in *Poetical Works*, 1868,

where it is included in *Dramatis Personæ*. The same volume contains a new stanza of eight lines, entitled "Deaf and Dumb: a Group by Woolner." This was written in 1862 for Woolner's partly-draped group of Constance and Arthur, the deaf and dumb children of Sir Thomas Fairbairn, which was exhibited in the International Exhibition of 1862.

29. THE POETICAL WORKS of Robert Browning, M.A., Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 15 Waterloo Place. 1868. Vol. I., pp. viii., 310. Pauline—Paracelsus—Strafford. Vol. II., pp. iv., 287. Sordello—Pippa Passes. Vol. III., pp. iv., 305. King Victor and King Charles—Dramatic Lyrics—The Return of the Druses. Vol. IV., pp. iv., 321. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon—Colombe's Birthday—Dramatic Romances. Vol. V., pp. iv., 321. A Soul's Tragedy—Luria—Christmas Eve and Easter Day—Men and Women. Vol. VI., pp. iv., 233. In a Balcony—Dramatis Personæ. This edition retains the redistribution of the minor poems in the edition of 1863, already mentioned.

30. THE RING AND THE BOOK. By Robert Browning, M.A., Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. In four volumes. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1868-9. Vol. I., pp. iv., 245; Vol. II., pp. iv., 251; Vol. III., pp. iv., 250; Vol. IV., pp. iv., 235.

31. Hervé Riel.—*Cornhill Magazine*, March 1871, pp. 257-60. Reprinted in *Pacchiarotto, and other Poems* (1876).

32. BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE: Including a Transcript from Euripides. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1871, pp. iv., 170.

33. PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU: SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1871, pp. iv., 148.

34. FIFINE AT THE FAIR. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1872, pp. xii., 171.

35. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country: or, Turf and Towers. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1873, pp. iv., 282.

36. Aristophanes' Apology: Including a Transcript from Euripides: Being the Last Adventure of Balaustion. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1875, pp. viii., 366.

37. The Inn Album. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1875, pp. iv., 211.

38. Pacchiarotto, and how he worked in Distemper: with other Poems. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1876, pp. viii., 241.

Contents:—1. Prologue. 2. Of Pacchiarotto, and how he worked in Distemper. 3. At the "Mermaid." 4. House. 5. Shop. 6. Pisgah-Sights (1, 2). 7. Fears and Scruples. 8. Natural Magic. 9. Magical Nature. 10. Bifurcation. 11. Numpholeptos. 12. Appearances. 13. St. Martin's Summer. 14. Hervé Riel. 15. A Forgiveness. 16. Cenciaja. 17. Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial (a Reminiscence of A.D. 1676). 18. Epilogue.

39. The Agamemnon of Æschylus. Transcribed by Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1877, pp. xi. (Preface, v.-xi.), 148.

40. La Saisiaz: The Two Poets of Croisic. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1878, pp. viii., 201.

Contents:—1. Prologue 2. La Saisiaz (pp. 5-82). The Two Poets of Croisic (pp. 87-191). Epilogue.

41. Song. ("The Blind Man to the Maiden said")—*The Hour will come*. By Wilhelmine von Hillern. Translated from the German by Clara Bell. London, 1879, Vol. II.. p. 174. Not reprinted.

42. "Oh, Love, Love": Translation from the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. (Eighteen lines, dated "Dec. 18, 1878"). Contributed to Prof. J. P. Mahaffy's *Euripides* ("Classical Writers." Macmillan, 1879). P. 116.

43. Dramatic Idyls. By Robert Browning. London : Smith, Elder and Co. 1879, pp. vi., 143.

Contents :—1. Martin Relph. 2. Pheidippides. 3. Halbert and Hob. 4. Ivàn Ivànovitch. 5. Tray. 6. Ned Bratts.

44. Dramatic Idyls. Second Series. By Robert Browning. London : Smith, Elder and Co. 1880, pp. viii., 149.

Contents :—Prologue. 1. Echetlos 2. Clive. 3. Muléykeh. 4. Pietro of Abano. 5. Doctor ——. 6. Pan and Luna. Epilogue.

45. Ten New Lines to "Epilogue." — *Scribner's Century Magazine*, November 1882, pp. 159-60. Lines written in an autograph album, October 14, 1880. Printed in the *Century* without Browning's consent. Reprinted in the first issue of the Browning Society's Papers, Part III., p. 48, but withdrawn from the second issue.

46. Jocoseria. By Robert Browning. London : Smith, Elder and Co. 1883, pp. viii., 143.

Contents :—1. Wanting is—What ? 2. Donald. 3. Solomon and Balkis. 4. Cristina and Monaldeschi. 5. Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli. 6. Adam, Lilith, and Eve. 7. Ixion. 8. Jochanan Hakkadosh. 9. Never the Time and the Place. 10. Pambo.

47. Sonnet on Goldoni (dated "Venice, Nov. 27, 1883").—*Pall Mall Gazette*, December 8, 1883, p. 2. Written for the Album of the Committee of the Goldoni Monument at Venice, and inserted on the first page. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part V. p. 98.*

48. Paraphrase from Horace.—*Pall Mall Gazette*, December 13, 1883, p. 6. Four lines, written impromptu for Mr. Felix Moscheles. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part V., p. 99.*

49. Helen's Tower: Sonnet (Dated "April 26, 1870").—*Pall Mall Gazette*, December 28, 1883, p. 2. Reprinted in Browning Society's Papers, Part V., p. 97.* Written for the Earl of Dufferin, who built a tower in memory

of his mother, Helen, Countess of Gifford, on a rock on his estate, at Clandeboye, Ireland, and originally printed in the later copies of a privately printed pamphlet called *Helen's Tower*. Lord Tennyson's lines, written on the same occasion, appeared a little previously in *The Leisure Hour*.

50. The Divine Order, and other Sermons and Addresses. By the late Thomas Jones. Edited by Brynmor Jones, LL.B. With Introduction by Robert Browning. London: W. Isbister. 1884. The introduction is on pp. xi.-xiii.

51. Sonnet on Rawdon Brown. (Dated "November 28, 1883").—*Century Magazine*, "Bric-à-brac" column, February 1884. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part V., p. 132.* Written at Venice, on an apocryphal story relating to the late Mr Rawdon Brown, who "went to Venice for a short visit, with a definite object in view, and ended by staying forty years."

52. The Founder of the Feast: Sonnet. (Dated "April 5, 1884").—*The World*, April 16, 1884. Inscribed by Browning in the Album presented to Mr Arthur Chappell, director of the St. James's Hall Saturday and Monday Popular Concerts. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part VII., p. 18.*

53. The Names: Sonnet on Shakespeare. (Dated "March 12, 1884").—*Shakespere Show Book*, May 29, 1884, p. 1. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part V., p. 105.*

54. Ferishtah's Fancies. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1884, pp. viii., 143. Each blank verse "Fancy" is followed by a short lyric.

Contents:—Prologue. Ferishtah's Fancies: 1. The Eagle. 2. The Melon-seller. 3. Shah Abbas. 4. The Family. 5. The Sun. 6. Mihrab Shah. 7. A Camel-Driver. 8. Two Camels. 9. Cherries. 10. Plot-Culture. 11. A Pillar at Sebzevah. 12. A Bean Stripe: also Apple-Eating. Epilogue.

55. Why I am a Liberal: Sonnet.—*Why I am a Liberal*, edited by Andrew Reid. London: Cassell and Co. 1885. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part VII., p. 92.*

54. Spring Song.—*The New Amphion;* being the book of the Edinburgh University Union Fancy Fair. Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, University Press. 1886. The poem is on p. 1. Reprinted in *Parleyings*, p. 189.

55. Prefatory Note to *Poems* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1887. Three pages, unnumbered.

56. Memorial Lines, for Memorial of the Queen's Jubilee, in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. 1887. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part X., p. 234.*

57. PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY: to wit, Bernard de Mandeville, Daniel Bartoli, Christopher Smart, George Bubb Dodington, Francis Furini, Gerard de Lairesse, and Charles Avison. Introduced by a Dialogue between Apollo and the Fates, concluded by another between John Fust and his Friends. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 15 Waterloo Place. 1887, pp. viii., 268. (*Poetical Works*, 1889, Vol. XVI., pp. 93-275.)

Contents:—Apollo and the Fates—a Prologue. Parleyings: 1. With Bernard de Mandeville. 2. With Daniel Bartoli. 3. With Christopher Avison. 4. With George Bubb Dodington. 5. With Francis Furini. 6. With Gerard de Lairesse. 7. With Charles Avison. Fust and his Friends—an Epilogue.

58. An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Robert Browning. Being a Reprint of the Introductory Essay prefixed to the volume of [25 spurious] Letters of Shelley, published by Edward Moxon in 1852. Edited by W. Tyas Harden. London: Published for the Shelley Society by Reeves and Turner, 196 Strand, 1888, pp. 27. See No. 17 above.

59. To Edward Fitzgerald. (Dated July 8, 1889).—*The*

Athenæum, No. 3,220, July 13, 1889, p. 64. Reprinted in the Browning Society's Papers, Part XI., p. 347.*

60. Lines addressed to Levi Lincoln Thaxter. (Written in 1885).—*Poet Lore*, Vol. I., August 1889, p. 398.

61. The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 15 Waterloo Place. 17 volumes. Vol. I.-XVI., 1889; Vol. XVII., 1894.

Vol. I. pp. viii., 289. Pauline—Sordello. Vol. II., pp. vi., 307. Paracelsus—Strafford. Vol. III., pp. vi., 255. Pippa Passes, King Victor and King Charles, The Return of the Druses, A Soul's Tragedy. Vol. IV., pp. vi., 305. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, Colombe's Birthday, Men and Women. Vol. V., pp. vi., 307. Dramatic Romances, Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day. Vol. VI., pp. vii., 289. Dramatic Lyrics, Luria. Vol. VII., pp. vi., 255. In a Balcony, Dramatis Personæ. Vol. VIII., pp. 253. The Ring and the Book, Vol. I. Vol. IX., pp. 313. The Ring and the Book, Vol. II. Vol. X., pp. 279. The Ring and the Book, Vol. III. Vol. XI., pp. 343. Balaustion's Adventure, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Fifine at the Fair. Vol. XII., pp. 311. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, The Inn Album, Vol. XIII., pp. 357. Aristophanes' Apology, The Agamemnon of Æschylus. Vol. XIV., pp. vi., 279. Pacchiarotto and how he worked in Distemper, with other Poems. [La Saisiaz, the Two Poets of Croisic.] Vol. XV., pp. vi., 260. Dramatic Idyls, Jocoseria. Vol. XVI., pp. vi., 275. Ferishtah's Fancies. Parleyings with Certain People. General Index, pp. 277-85; Index to First Lines of Shorter Poems, pp. 287-92. Vol. XVII., pp. viii., 288. Asolando, Biographical and Historical Notes to the Poems. General Index, pp. 289-99; Index to First Lines of Shorter Poems, pp. 301-307. This edition contains Browning's final text of his poems.

62. Asolando: Fancies and Facts. By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 15 Waterloo Place. 1890, pp. viii., 157. (*Poetical Works*, 1894, Vol. XVII., pp. 1-131.)

Contents:—Prologue. 1. Rosny. 2. Dubiety. 3. Now. 4. Humility. 5. Poetics. 6. Summum Bonum. 7. A Pearl, a Girl. 8. Speculative. 9. White Witchcraft. 10. Bad Dreams (i.-iv.). 11. Inapprehensiveness. 12. Which? 13. The Cardinal and the Dog. 14. The Pope and the Net. 15. The Bean-Feast. 16. Muckle-mouth Meg. 17. Arcades Ambo. 18. The Lady and the Painter. 19. Ponte dell' Angelo, Venice.

20. Beatrice Signorini. 21. Flute-Music, with an Accompaniment. 22. "Imperante Augusto natus est—." 23. Development. 24. Rephan. 25. Reverie. Prologue.

63. The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. With Portraits. In two volumes. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 15 Waterloo Place, 1896. Vol. I., pp. viii., 784; Vol. II., pp. vii., 786.

The Editor's note, after p. viii., signed "Augustine Birrell," says: "All that has been done is to prefix (within square brackets) to some of the plays and poems a few lines explanatory of the characters and events depicted and described, and to explain in the margin of the volumes the meaning of such words as might, if left unexplained, momentarily arrest the understanding of the reader . . . Mr. F. G. Kenyon has been kind enough to make the notes for 'The Ring and the Book,' but for the rest the editor alone is responsible." The text is that of the edition of 1889, 1894, but the arrangement is more strictly chronological. The notes are throughout unnecessary and to be regretted.

II.

REPRINT OF DISCARDED PREFACES TO THE FIRST EDITIONS OF SOME OF BROWNING'S WORKS

1. Preface to *Paracelsus* (1835).

"I am anxious that the reader should not, at the very outset,—mistaking my performance for one of a class with which it has nothing in common,—judge it by principles on which it has never been moulded, and subject it to a standard to which it was never meant to conform. I therefore anticipate his discovery, that it is an attempt, probably more novel than happy, to reverse the method usually adopted by writers, whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons or events; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded; and this for a reason. I have endeavoured to write a poem, not a drama: the canons of the drama are well known, and I cannot but think that, inasmuch as they have immediate regard to stage representation, the peculiar advantages they hold out are really such, only so long as the purpose for which they were at first instituted is kept in view. I do not very well understand what is called a Dramatic Poem, wherein all those restrictions only submitted to on account of compensating good in the original scheme are scrupulously retained, as though for some special fitness in themselves,—and all new facilities placed at an author's disposal by the vehicle he selects, as pertina-

ciously rejected. It is certain, however, that a work like mine depends more immediately on the intelligence and sympathy of the reader for its success ;—indeed, were my scenes stars, it must be his co-operating fancy which, supplying all chasms, shall connect the scattered lights into one constellation—a Lyre or a Crown. I trust for his indulgence towards a poem which had not been imagined six months ago, and that even should he think slightingly of the present (an experiment I am in no case likely to repeat) he will not be prejudiced against other productions which may follow in a more popular, and perhaps less difficult form.

15th March 1835."

2. Preface to *Strafford* (1837).

"I had for some sime been engaged in a poem of a very different nature [*Sordello*] when induced to make the present attempt ; and am not without apprehension that my eagerness to freshen a jaded mind by diverting it to the healthy natures of a grand epoch, may have operated unfavourably on the represented play, which is one of Action in Character, rather than Character in Action. To remedy this, in some degree, considerable curtailment will be necessary, and, in a few instances, the supplying details not required, I suppose, by the mere reader. While a trifling success would much gratify, failure will not wholly discourage me from another effort: experience is to come, and earnest endeavour may yet remove many disadvantages.

The portraits are, I think, faithful ; and I am exceedingly fortunate in being able, in proof of this, to refer to the subtle and eloquent exposition of the characters of Eliot and Strafford, in the Lives of Eminent British Statesmen now in the course of publication in Lardner's Cyclopædia, by a writer [John Forster] whom I am proud to call my friend ; and whose biographies of Hampden, Pym, and Vane, will, I am sure, fitly illustrate the present year—the Second Centenary of the

Trial concerning Ship-money. My Carlisle, however, is purely imaginary: I at first sketched her singular likeness roughly in, as suggested by Matthew and the memoir-writers—but it was too artificial, and the substituted outline is exclusively from Voiture and Waller.

The Italian boat-song in the last scene is from Redi's *Bacco*, long since naturalised in the joyous and delicate version of Leigh Hunt."

3. Preface to *Sordello* (not in first edition, but added in 1863). I reprint it, though still retained by the author, on account of its great importance as a piece of self-criticism or self-interpretation.

"To J. Milsand, of Dijon.

Dear Friend,—Let the next poem be introduced by your name, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me. I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book, such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must,—like: but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so: and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours, R. B.

London, June 9, 1863."

4. Preface to *Bells and Pomegranates.*—I. *Pippa Passes* (1841).

"ADVERTISEMENT.

Two or three years ago I wrote a Play, about which the chief matter I much care to recollect at present is, that a Pit-full of good-natured people applauded it: ever since, I have been desirous of doing something in the same way that should better reward their attention. What follows, I mean for the first of a series of Dramatical Pieces, to come out at intervals; and I amuse myself by fancying that the cheap mode in which they appear, will for once help me to a sort of Pit-audience again. Of course such a work must go on no longer than it is liked; and to provide against a certain and but too possible contingency, let me hasten to say now—what, if I were sure of success, I would try to say circumstantially enough at the close—that I dedicate my best intentions most admiringly to the author of 'Ion'—most affectionately to Serjeant Talfourd.

ROBERT BROWNING."

5. Preface to *Bells and Pomegranates.*—VIII. *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy.*

"Here ends my first series of 'Bells and Pomegranates:' and I take the opportunity of explaining, in reply to inquiries, that I only meant by that title to indicate an endeavour towards something like an alteration, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought; which looks too ambitious, thus expressed, so the symbol was preferred. It is little to the purpose, that such is actually one of the most familiar of the many Rabbinical (and Patristic) acceptations of the phrase; because I confess that, letting authority alone, I supposed the bare words, in such juxtaposition, would sufficiently convey the desired meaning. 'Faith and good works' is another fancy, for instance, and perhaps no easier to arrive at: yet Giotto placed a pomegranate-fruit in the hand of Dante, and

Raffaelle crowned his Theology (in the *Camera della Segnatura*) with blossoms of the same ; as if the Bellari and Vasari would be sure to come after, and explain that it was merely '*simbolo delle buone opere—il qual Pomogranato fu però usato nelle vesti del Pontefice appresso gli Ebrei.*' R. B."

It may be worth while to append the interesting concluding paragraph of the preface to the first series of *Selections*, issued by Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co. in 1872 :

"A few years ago, had such an opportunity presented itself, I might have been tempted to say a word in reply to the objections my poetry was used to encounter. Time has kindly co-operated with my disinclination to write the poetry and the criticism besides. The readers I am at last privileged to expect, meet me fully half-way ; and if, from their fitting standpoint, they must still 'censure me in their wisdom,' they have previously 'awakened their senses that they may the better judge.' Nor do I apprehend any more charges of being wilfully obscure, unconscientiously careless, or perversely harsh Having hitherto done my utmost in the art to which my life is a devotion, I cannot engage to increase the effort ; but I conceive that there may be helpful light, as well as reassuring warmth, in the attention and sympathy I gratefully acknowledge. R. B.

London, May 14, 1872."

INDEX TO POEMS

Abt Vogler, 23, 145, 146, 147
Adam, Lilith, and Eve, 220, 221
After, 128, 129
"Agamemnon (The), of Æschylus," 17, 202, 203
Andrea del Sarto, 23, 59, 82, 104, 107, 109, 113, 135, 179
Another Way of Love, 130
Any Wife to Any Husband, 124
Apparent Failure, 145
Appearances, 197
Arcades Ambo, 236
"Aristophanes' Apology," 17, 185, 190
Artemis Prologuizes, 63, 64, 85
"Asolando: Fancies and Facts," 231-239
At the Mermaid, 194, 196, 197

Bad Dreams, 232, 234, 236
"Balaustion's Adventure," 169, 173, 186
Bean-Feast, The, 236
Bean-Stripe (A): also Apple-Eating, 225
Beatrice Signorini, 234
Before, 128
Bifurcation, 198
Bishop Blougram's Apology, 27, 105, 111-113, 144
Bishop (The) Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church, 83-85, 115
"Blot in the 'Scutcheon, A," 17, 69-72, 74, 91, 95
Boy and the Angel, The, 89
By the Fireside, 126, 139

Caliban upon Setebos, 27, 141-144
Camel-Driver, A, 224
Cardinal and the Dog, The, 236, 237
Cavalier Tunes, 62
Cenciaja, 201
Cherries, 224
'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower, came,' 118-120
"Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day," 98-103
Cleon, 105, 109, 111, 143
Clive, 214, 215
"Colombe's Birthday," 73-76, 91
Confessional, The, 86
Confessions, 27, 139-141
Count Gismond, 62-63
Cristina, 63
Cristina and Monaldeschi, 221-222

Deaf and Dumb, 145
Death in the Desert, A, 141, 142
'De Gustibus,' 26, 130
Development, 232
Dîs aliter Visum, 27, 138
Doctor ——, 193, 217.
Donald, 222
"Dramatic Idyls," 208-213
"Dramatic Idyls" (Second Series), 213-218
"Dramatic Lyrics," 58-65
"Dramatic Romances and Lyrics," 56, 77-90
"Dramatis Personæ," 135-150, 194
Dubiety, 233

Eagle, The, 224
Earth's Immortalities, 80
Echetlos, 213, 214
Englishman in Italy, The, 25, 87
Epilogue to "Dramatic Idyls" (Second Series), 218
Epilogue to "Dramatis Personæ," 194
Epilogue to Pacchiarotto, 194, 195-196
Epilogue to The Two Poets of Croisic, 208
Epistle of Karshish, 104, 105, 109-111, 234
Eurydice and Orpheus, 145
Evelyn Hope, 63, 122

FACE, A, 145
Family, The, 224
Fears and Scruples, 197
"Ferishtah's Fancies," 98, 223, 226
"Fifine at the Fair," 17, 111, 130, 177-182, 184
Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial, 201
Flight of the Duchess, The, 88
Flower's Name, The, 80
Flute Music, with an Accompaniment, 233
Forgiveness, A, 199
Fra Lippo Lippi, 23, 27, 105, 107, 113

GARDEN FANCIES, 80
Girl, A, 232
Glove, The, 87
Gold Hair: a Story of Pornic, 145
Grammarian's Funeral, A, 115
Guardian Angel, The, 23, 113,

HALBERT AND HOB, 210
Heretic's Tragedy, The, 27, 115, 116-117, 143
Hervé Riel, 194, 200
Holy-Cross Day, 27, 115, 117
Home-Thoughts from Abroad, 77, 78
Home-Thoughts from the Sea, 78
House, 194, 197
How it strikes a Contemporary, 128
How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix, 77
Humility, 233, 236

"IN A BALCONY," 105, 132, 135
In a Gondola, 64
Inapprehensiveness, 233
In a Year, 130
Incident of the French Camp, 62
"Inn Album, The," 7, 22, 190, 193
Instans Tyrannus, 129
In Three Days, 130
Italian in England, The, 87
Ivàn Ivànovitch, 26, 210, 211-212
Ixion, 219-220

JAMES LEE'S WIFE, 118, 136, 137
Jochanan Hakkadosh, 219
"Jocoseria," 218, 223
Johannes Agricola, 59

"KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES," 56-58, 66

LABORATORY, THE, 86
"La Saisiaz," 98, 204, 208
Last Ride Together, The, 81, 125, 130
Life in a Love, 130
Light Woman, A, 130
Likeness, A, 141
Lost Leader, The, 77, 78
Lost Mistress, The, 79, 130
Love among the Ruins, 120, 121
Love in a Life, 130
Lovers' Quarrel, A, 27, 121, 122
"Luria," 4, 91, 95-98, 211, 212

MAGICAL NATURE, 175, 197-198
Martin Relph, 209, 210, 211
Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli, 222
Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, 23, 24, 113, 114
May and Death, 145
Meeting at Night, 81, 82
Melon-Seller, The, 224
Memorabilia, 131
"Men and Women," 15, 58, 77, 85, 89, 91, 104, 132, 135, 141, 199, 232
Mesmerism, 129
Mihrab Shah, 224
Misconceptions, 130, 197
Mr Sludge, "The Medium," 27, 141, 144
Muckle-mouth Meg, 236
Muléykeh, 191, 215, 217
My Last Duchess, 59, 60, 61, 199, 233
My Star, 130

NATIONALITY IN DRINKS, 78
Natural Magic, 197
Ned Bratts, 26, 27, 210, 212
Never the Time and the Place 222, 223
Now, 233
Numpholeptos,' 198, 199

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE, 24, 113, 114
One Way of Love, 130, 131, 132
One Word More, 126

PACCHIAROTTO, 27, 88, 194, 195
"Pacchiarotto and Other Poems," 194, 201
Pambo, 222
Pan and Luna, 214
"Paracelsus," 6, 37, 41, 49, 59, 74, 118, 218, 229
"Parleyings with certain People," 226-230
Parting at Morning, 82
Patriot, The: an Old Story, 129
"Pauline," 33-36, 37, 49, 59, 118
Pearl, A, 232
Pheidippides, 212, 213
Pictor Ignotus, 23, 82, 83, 85
Pied Piper of Hamelin, The, 27, 65, 77
Pietro of Abano, 217
Pillar at Sebzevah, A, 225
"Pippa Passes," 52-56, 94, 132, 151
Pisgah-Sights, 197
Plot-Culture, 225
Poetics, 232
Pope and the Net, The, 236
Popularity, 131
Porphyria's Lover, 25, 59
Pretty Woman, A, 130
"Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," 17, 111, 173, 177, 184, 192
Prospice, 145, 148-150
Protus, 117

RABBI BEN EZRA, 145, 147, 148
"Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country," 7, 182, 185, 190, 192
Rephan, 231
Respectability, 129
"Return of the Druses, The," 65, 69, 74
Reverie, 231
"Ring and the Book, The," 17, 20, 136, 150, 169, 173, 233
Rosny, 232
Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli, 63

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER, 195
Saul, 89, 90
Serenade at the Villa, A, 25, 26, 124
Shah Abbas, 224
Shop, 194, 197
Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, 27, 80
Solomon and Balkis, 220
Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, 27, 62, 129
"Sordello," 7, 17, 37, 42, 44, 52, 55, 59, 145, 229
"Soul's Tragedy, A," 27, 91, 95, 132
Speculative, 233, 235
Statue and the Bust, The, 127
"Strafford," 41, 44, 57, 132
Summum Bonum, 232, 235, 236
Sun, The, 224

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR, 62
Time's Revenges, 86
Toccata of Galuppi's, A, 23, 113, 114
Too Late, 136, 137, 138
'Transcendentalism,' 128
Tray, 222
Twins, The, 130
Two Camels, 224
Two in the Campagna, 125
"Two Poets of Croisic, The," 206-208

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY, 27, 130

WANTING IS—WHAT? 222
Waring, 61, 62
Which, 234
White Witchcraft, 236
Woman's Last Word, A, 122, 124
Women and Roses, 130
Worst of It, The, 136, 137

YOUTH AND ART, 139

BY THE SAME WRITER

Poems (collected edition in two volumes) 1902.

Aubrey Beardsley, 1897.

The Symbolist Movement in Literature, 1899.

Plays, Acting and Music, 1903.

Cities, 1903.

Studies in Prose and Verse, 1904

A Book of Twenty Songs, 1905.

Spiritual Adventures, 1905.

Studies in Seven Arts, 1906.

The Fool of the World, and other Poems, 1906.

COLSTON AND COY. LIMITED PRINTERS, EDINBURGH

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 396 362 6